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Project Alliance

Justice and Education in Collaboration for Youth

Innovations in Violence Prevention: Strategies for the Elementary Grades

Conference Support Materials

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS
COLLECTION

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Friday, October 6, 1995

7:45 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Regis College, Weston

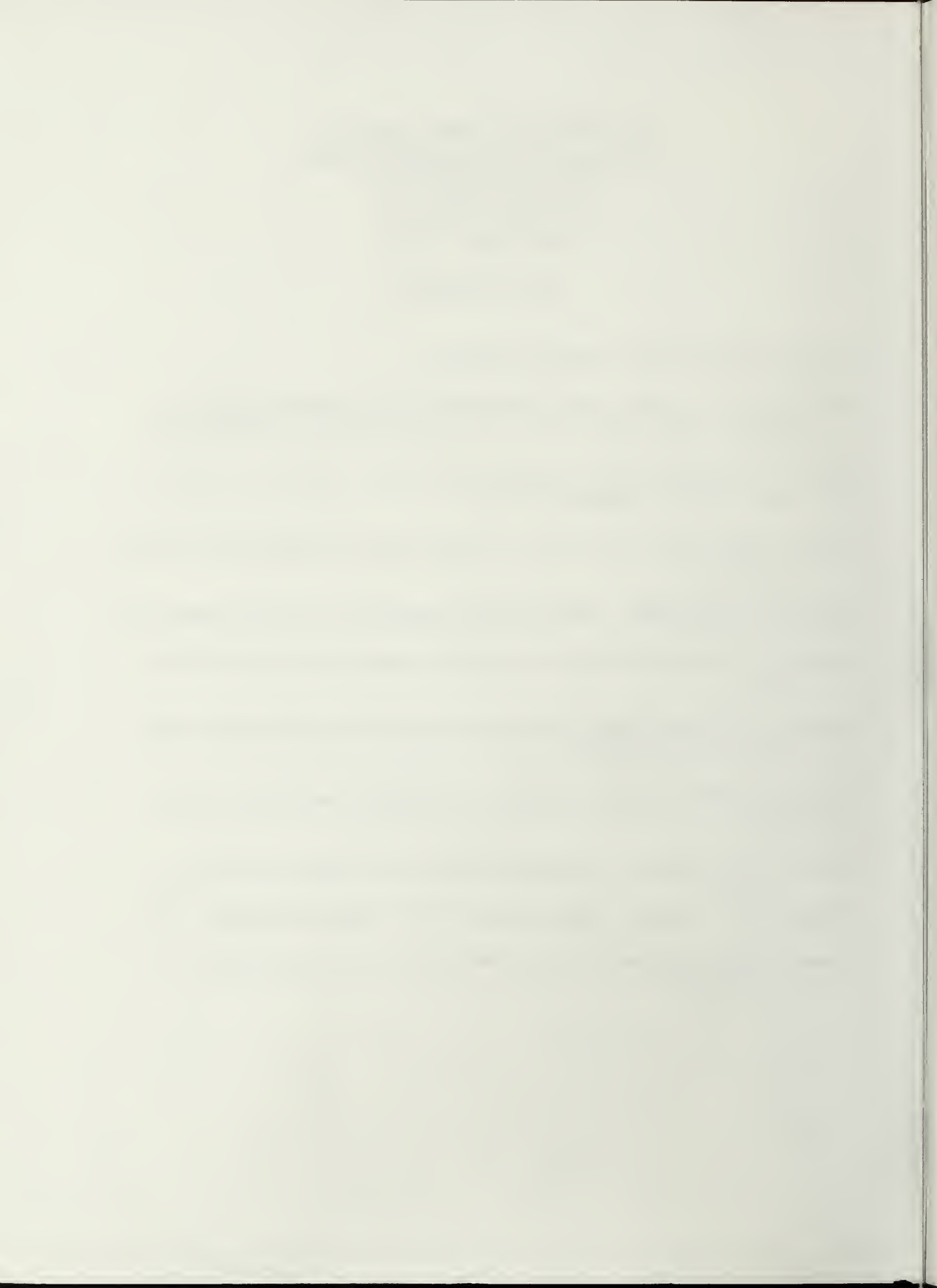


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Support Materials

This packet contains copies of the following references:

- Watts, C. (1993, November). Learning to be peaceful people: Violence prevention starts in elementary schools. *Harvard Graduate School of Education, Alumni Bulletin*, 10-11.
- Brooks, R.B. (1992, June). Self-esteem during the school years. *Development and Behavior: Older Children and Adolescents*, 537 - 550.
- Nelsen, J., Lott, L., & Glenn, H. S. The positive discipline dream. In *Positive Discipline in the Classroom*.
- Lickona, T. (1993, November). The return of character education. *Educational Leadership*, 6-9.
- Ryan, K. (1993, November). Mining the values in the curriculum. *Educational Leadership*, 16-18.
- Williams, M. M. (1993, November). Actions speak louder than words: What students think. *Educational Leadership*, 22-23.
- Curwin, R. L. (1993, November). The healing power of altruism. *Educational Leadership*, 36-39.
- Woehrle, T. (1993, November). Growing up responsible. *Educational Leadership*, 40-41.
- Benard, B. (1993, November). Fostering resiliency in kids. *Educational Leadership*, 44-48.
- Leming, J. S. (1993, November). In search of effective character education. *Educational Leadership*, 63-71.



"Learning to be peaceful people"

Violence Prevention Starts in Elementary Schools

CAROLINE WATTS

A long, low, brown concrete building sandwiched in between two middle-class housing developments, fronted by a scrubby playing field and a parking lot – the physical features of the W.H. Ohrenberger Elementary School in West Roxbury belie the energy and personality of the students and staff within its walls.

On a purely superficial level, Ohrenberger seems much further from the Harvard Graduate School of Education than its 13 geographical miles. A look inside, however, reveals that Harvard Ed

School students have become an important part of the Ohrenberger community. As a partner in the Judge Baker/Ohrenberger Partnership Program, HGSE has become an essential link in Ohrenberger's student support services network for the 600 students enrolled in grades K through 5.

Randy Costanza will tell you that. Last year Randy took part in pairs counseling, a



Fourth grader Kristal Zapata enjoys the challenges of the Partnership Program

Partnership Program service offered to fourth and fifth graders who need special support in developing positive, nonviolent peer relationships. A shy boy with an anxious but eager grin, Randy was especially fond of his pair counselor, Bill Mautz, Ed.M. '93. On his second day at school this year, Randy stuck his head into the Partnership Office to ask, "When does pairs start?"

The Partnership Program brings together the resources and expertise of HGSE's Risk and Prevention Program and the Judge Baker Children's Center, the second-oldest child guidance clinic in the country, to provide school-based counseling and prevention services at the Ohrenberger School.

In the past, counseling services at Ohrenberger have been provided on an individual basis to the most troubled students, at most, six or seven chil-

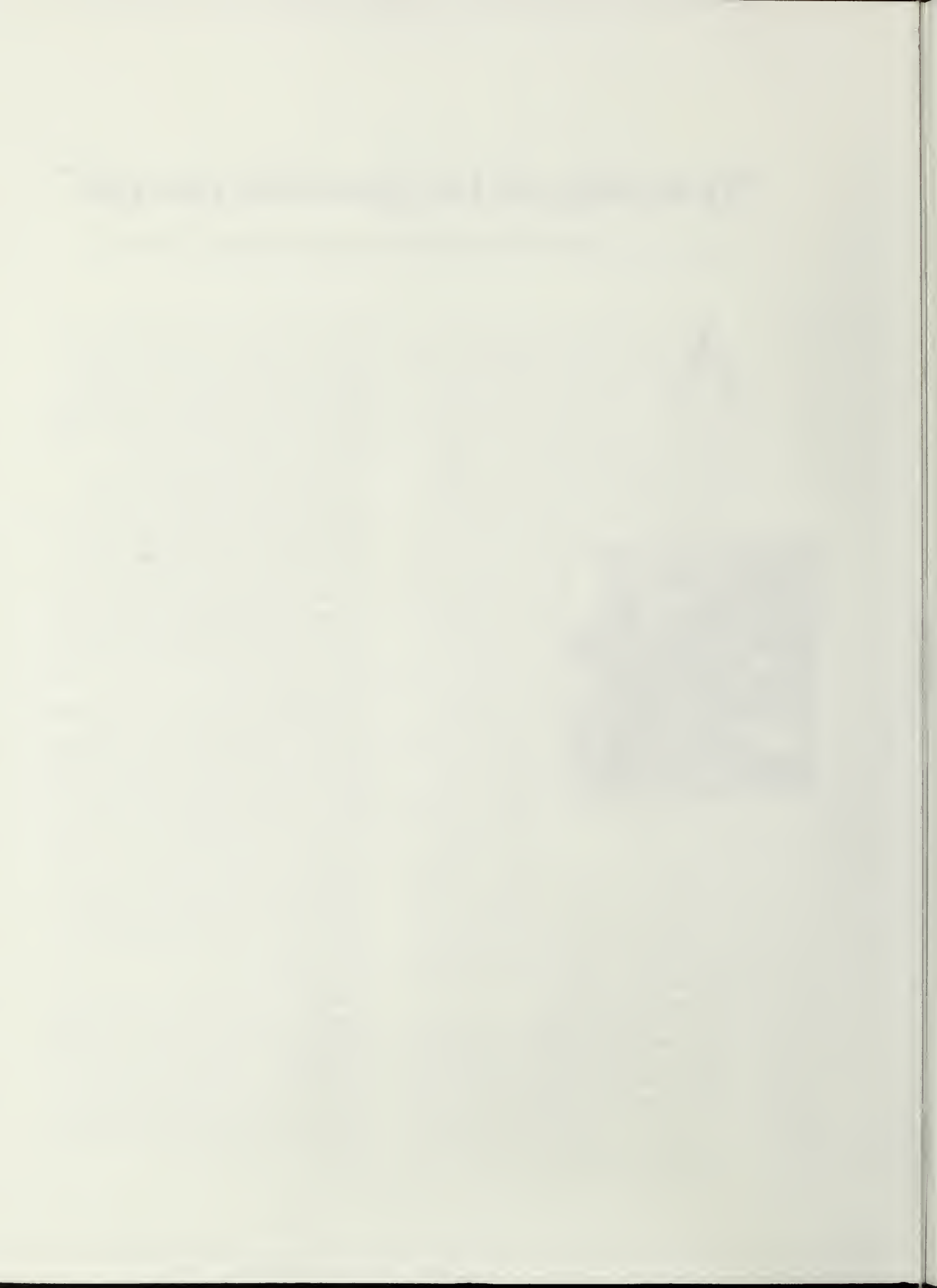
dren were served. In order to expand the reach of on-site supportive services, the Partnership has shifted focus to emphasize preventive approaches rather than intervention, and to serve pairs and groups of students as well as individuals. Using this model for the first time last year, close to 200 students participated in individual, pair, and group counseling services provided by the Partnership.

This year, Ed School students in the master's program in Risk and Prevention will work at Ohrenberger as pair counselors, primary prevention program developers, and classroom consultants.

Ohrenberger's principal, Mrs. Gloria Woods, is particularly interested in addressing issues of violence, positive relationship skills, and conflict resolution with many more students. "I believe in starting young," she says, "by getting to the students when they are in kindergarten and first grade, helping them with their self-esteem, learning how to be peaceful people."

With that mission in mind, the Partnership has initiated a primary prevention program in the first grade. The classroom-based service uses as its starting point a multicultural literacy and ethics curriculum called "Voices of Love and Freedom," developed by Patrick Walker and the Family, Friends, and Community Project. The goal of the curriculum – and of the project at Ohrenberger – is to help students develop at an early age a perspective on their own experience and feelings as well as an appreciation and respect for the experiences and feelings of others. Through the vehicle of read-aloud stories, students will be encouraged to make connections with their personal experiences, and to express their ideas and feelings.

In the story "Amazing Grace," for example, a little girl follows her dream of starring in the school play despite her classmates' ridicule, winning their respect and support in the process. The story highlights the themes of family relationships through the close connection between Grace and her grandmother, and racial and gender stereotyping when classmates tell Grace that an African-American girl like herself cannot play Peter Pan.





Students are given the opportunity – in group, partner-sharing, and parent involvement activities – to tell their own experiences of pursuing a dream despite opposition or self-doubt. The central themes of the curriculum – relationships with family, friends, and community – and the balance of love and freedom within these relationships – will be echoed in supplementary activities developed by two interns and first-grade teachers. All three grade students a healthy sense of self, uniqueness, and caring for others.

children learn to make more positive choices regarding relationships, particularly when interpersonal situations involve peer pressure and violence.



SELF-ESTEEM DURING THE SCHOOL YEARS

Its Normal Development and Hazardous Decline

Robert B. Brooks, PhD

In the past decade there has been increased recognition of the significant role that self-esteem plays in a child's development. Motivation and performance in school and in sports, the quality of peer relationships, the abuse of drugs and alcohol, teenage pregnancy, the willingness or lack of willingness to persevere at various tasks, and the capacity to be resilient and bounce back from adversity and failure are all influenced by how children feel and think about themselves and how they view their competencies.⁷⁻¹⁴ It is difficult to imagine any activity or behavior in which a child is engaged that is not impacted by the child's self-esteem.

Given the profound significance of self-esteem on each child's existence, this article addresses the following areas: (1) a definition of self-esteem; (2) the interaction of biologic and environmental factors in determining the development and maintenance of self-esteem; (3) a framework for understanding and assessing self-esteem; (4) behavioral manifestations of self-esteem, especially as expressed in different coping maneuvers; and (5) strategies and interventions to reinforce feelings of self-worth and self-acceptance in children and adolescents.

SELF-ESTEEM: A DEFINITION

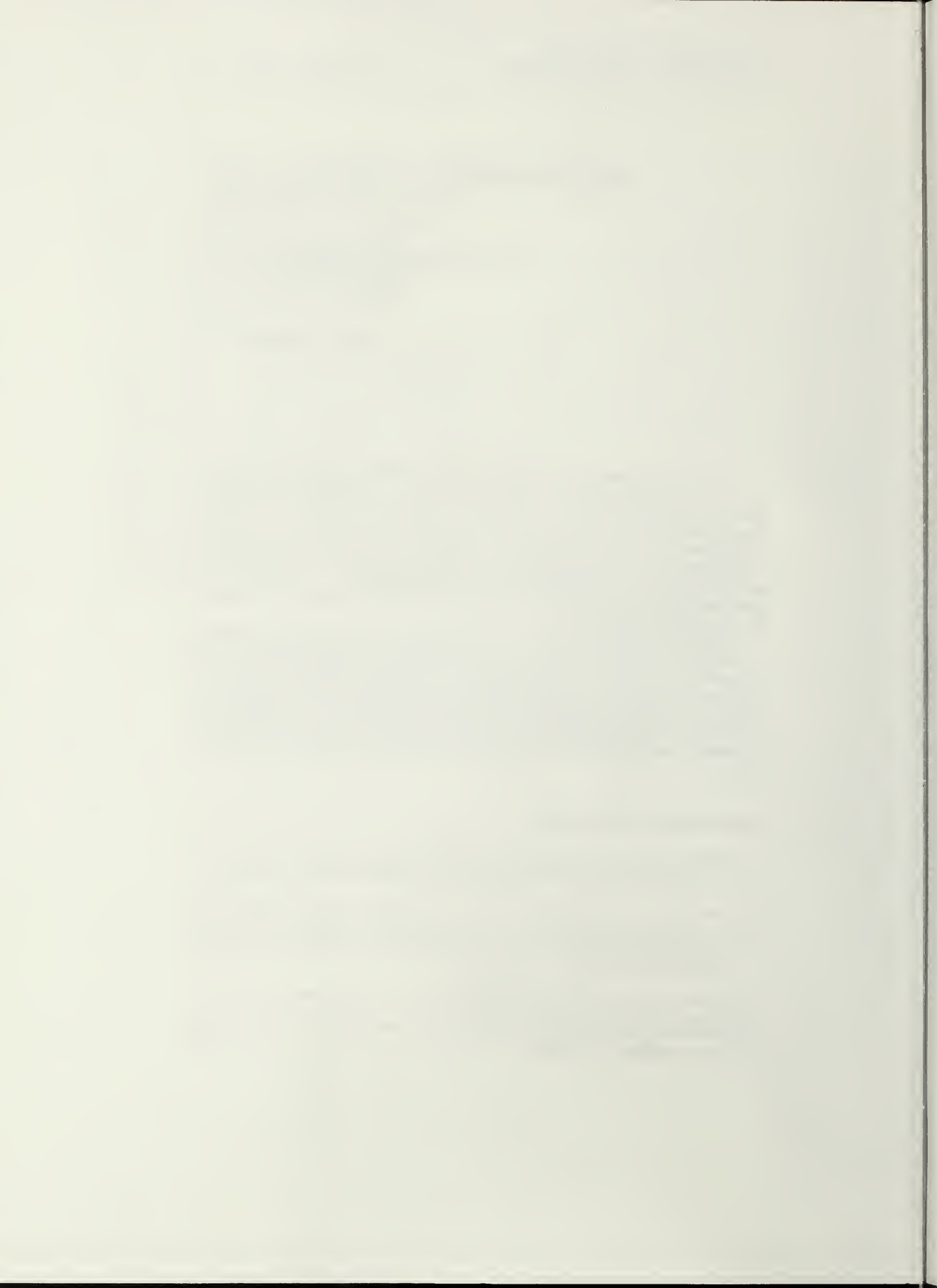
Researchers and clinicians have defined self-esteem in various ways.^{4, 5, 13, 21, 22} Many definitions and conceptualizations overlap, focusing on what individ-

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uals think and feel about themselves and their abilities to accomplish different tasks. Some definitions are rooted in the assumption that self-esteem is the difference between our "ideal self," or how we would like to be, versus how we actually see ourselves—the larger the difference between our perceived self and our ideal self, the lower our self-esteem.

Yet definitions that place the spotlight almost exclusively on what we think and feel about ourselves can lead to confusion between self-esteem and self-centeredness, conceit, and selfishness. The definition offered by the California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility lessens this possible confusion. The California group defined self-esteem not only in terms of "appreciating my own worth and importance," but also "having the character to be accountable for myself and to act responsibly toward others."¹⁴ This definition advances the belief that a basic ingredient of self-esteem includes the respect and caring we demonstrate towards others.

The concept of self-esteem may be seen as embracing the feelings and beliefs that individuals have pertaining to their competence and worth, to their abilities to make a difference, to confront and master challenges, to learn from both success and failure, and to treat themselves and others with respect.¹⁵ Self-esteem guides and motivates our actions and, in turn, the outcome of our actions impacts on our self-esteem so that a reciprocal process is always operating.¹⁶ Cycles of either low self-esteem, despair, and the avoidance of challenges or high self-esteem, hope, and the confrontation of challenges result.

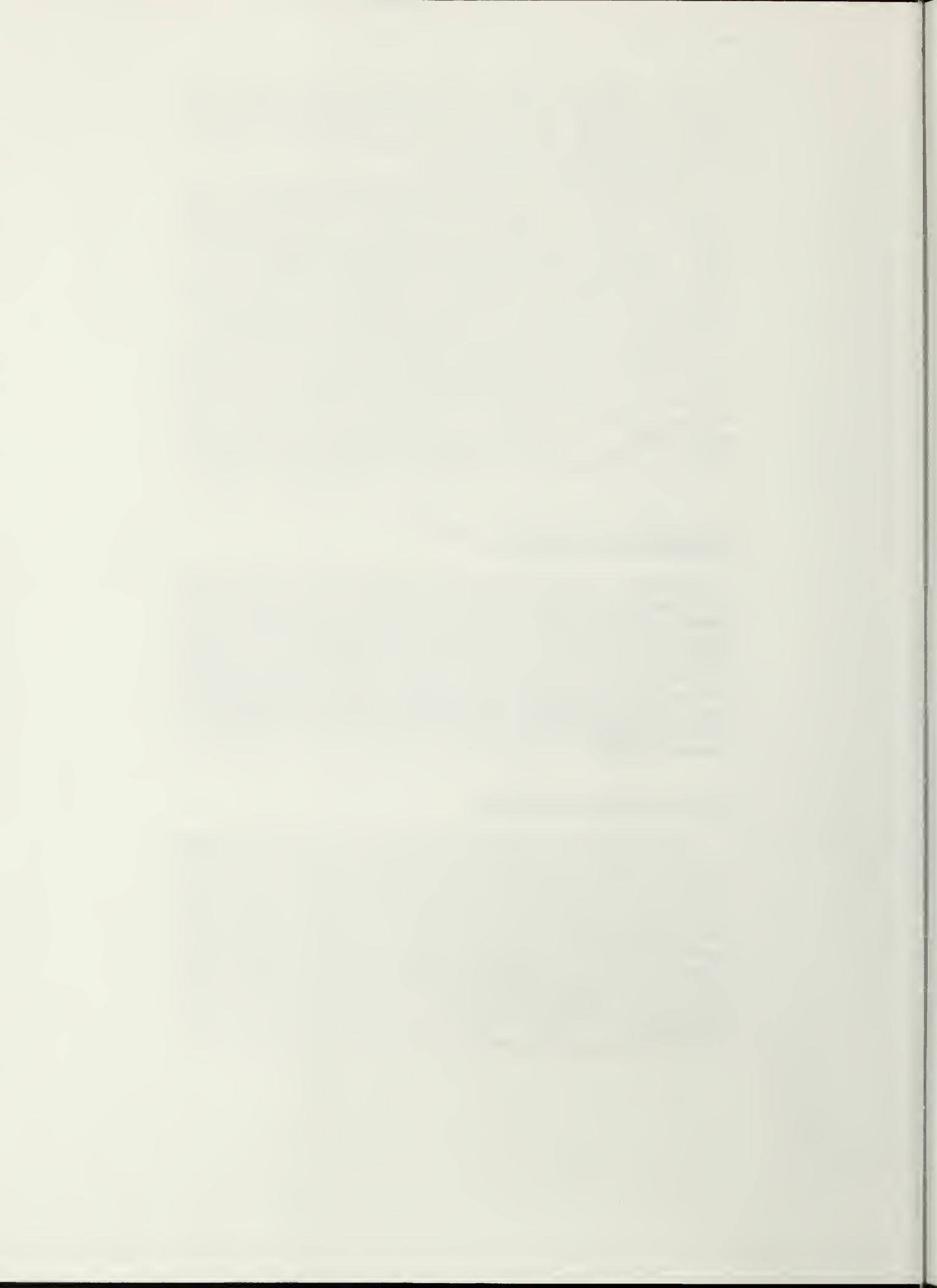
THE ROOTS OF SELF-ESTEEM: A BIOLOGIC-ENVIRONMENTAL INTERACTION

The question is often raised why some children and adolescents develop high self-esteem, whereas others are burdened by insecurity and doubt. The answer is complex. Certainly, childhood experiences play a crucial role in the emergence of self-esteem, but other variables contribute as well. For example, although I was not surprised to discover that the self-esteem of my patients who were physically and emotionally abused as children bore the deep scars of this abuse, it was more difficult to understand how individuals who were raised in seemingly loving and accepting homes could lack self-assurance. Also, what of those people with high self-esteem whose histories are riddled with hardship and abuse?

Biologic-Temperamental Influences

The development of self-esteem occurs within the dynamic interaction between a child's inborn temperament and the environmental forces that respond to the child.^{9, 13, 25} The work of Stella Chess and Alexander Thomas has vividly shown that infants are noticeably different at birth.¹³ Some are more active, others less so; some are hypersensitive to different sensory input, whereas others react in a less intense fashion; some are more responsive to interactions with others, whereas others seem more cautious; some seem easily satisfied and content, whereas others seem unhappy and insatiable. Given these variations in temperamental patterns, Chess and Thomas offered labels for three kinds of children: the easy child, the slow-to-warm-up child, and the difficult child.

Although Chess and Thomas note that these are not precise labels because



different children may demonstrate attributes from at least two of the groups, their work is a reminder that from birth some children may have a more difficult time developing a positive self-image because of their temperament. This is especially true of so-called difficult children, who are very challenging to raise and to educate. They frequently overreact to situations, reveal little pleasure in what they do, are insatiable in their demands, feeling that they never get their fair share, and often fail to attend or respond positively to others. They may leave the adults in their lives feeling frustrated, helpless, angry, and inadequate.

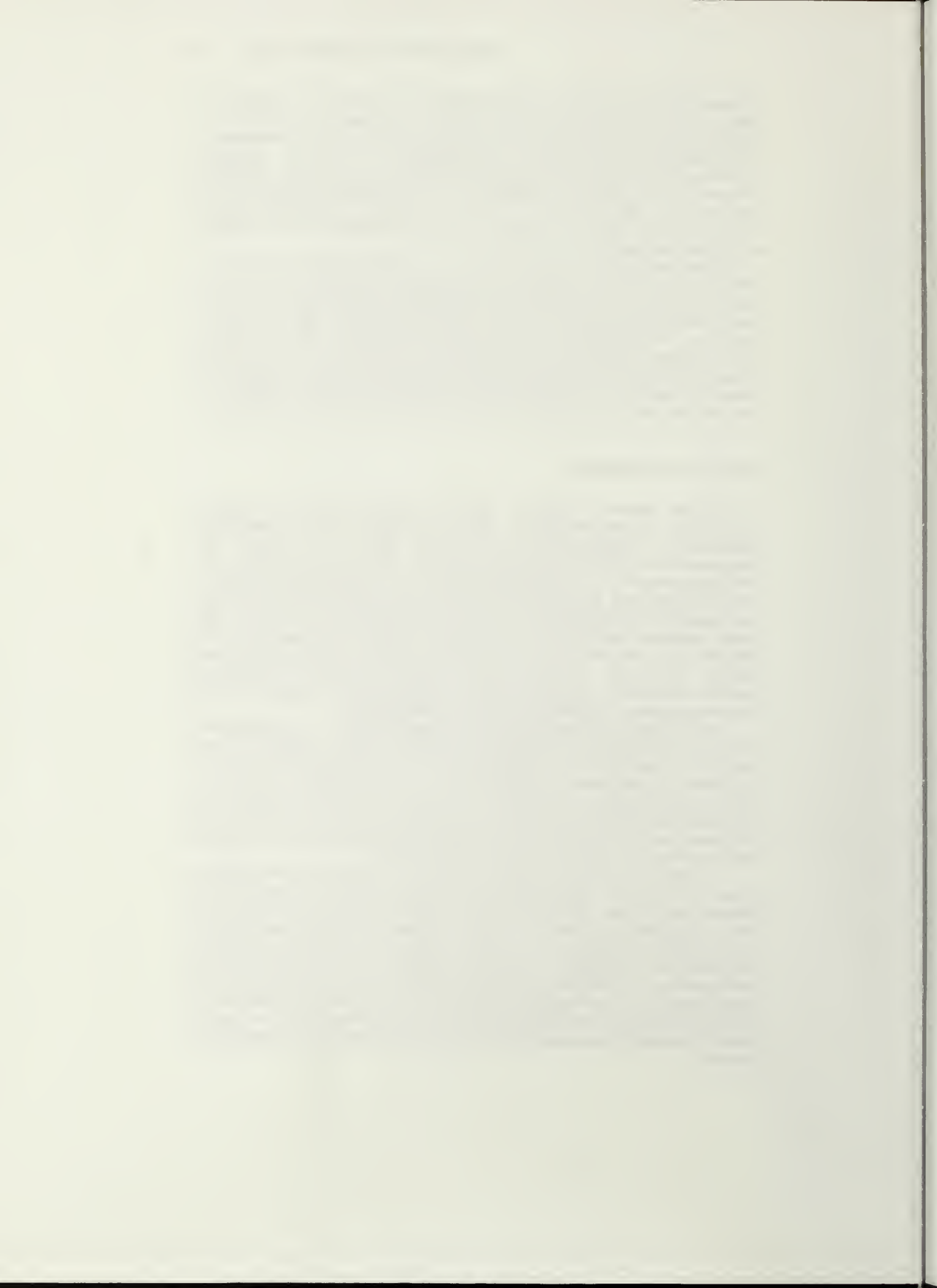
Pediatricians and family practitioners are usually the first professionals who have contact with parents about their infants. Pediatricians can have a major impact on the course of the parent-child relationship by educating parents about differences in temperament, by informing parents that they did not "cause" a difficult child, and that difficult children are not unreachable, but they require a different kind of parenting style than may be necessary for an easy-to-raise child.³⁰ A pediatrician's reassuring and realistic words can lessen the possibility that parents become estranged from their children at a very early age and that the child's self-esteem will start on a downward spiral.

Environmental Influences

It is also important to keep in mind that although certain temperamental characteristics define the difficult child, some parents, teachers, and other adults may not experience the so-called difficult child as very difficult. The temperamental style and expectations of adults influence their reaction to the child's unique style. As an example, parents with an active, outgoing demeanor may encounter more frustration and tension raising a child who tends to be cautious and laconic than they would if their child's approach to the world was more consonant with their own. Achievement-oriented parents may have difficulty being empathic with a child who has problems paying attention and learning. They might be prone to blame their child for being lazy and unmotivated, when in truth the child is expending much energy to succeed but the efforts are compromised by developmental delays.

These kinds of "mismatches" between parents (teachers, other adults) and children are sources of anger and disappointment. In such a situation it is not surprising to find children who believe they have let others down, that they are failures, or that others are unkind to them. Low self-esteem is a common outcome unless parents are able to lessen the effects of the mismatch by being more empathic, by understanding and appreciating their child's unique style and needs, and by modifying their own expectations and reactions in a direction that is more in accord with their child's temperament.

In essence, the unique qualities of children, including those qualities present at birth, not only influence how others respond to them but how children perceive the responses of others. (Some children, for example, seem more predisposed to viewing the actions of others in a positive way, whereas other youth are more prone to experience what others say and do as critical, judgmental, or inconsiderate.) These perceptions then determine the subsequent reactions of children, which in turn elicit further reactions from the environment. Given this ongoing, dynamic picture of child-environment interactions, the reinforcement of a child's self-esteem requires adults to recognize, respect, and accept the unique makeup of each child. As Stanley Coopersmith observed:



Such acceptance does not mean that the parent or teacher approves of all the child's qualities, but it does mean that the teacher or parent can see the child for what he is without being confused by his own feelings of dissatisfaction and desire to change him. . . . Without such acceptance he cannot be viewed for his strengths as well as limitations. Without such acceptance he can be ignored readily and rejected until he totally complies. Without such acceptance the child does not have the emotional support to change and try new ways of behaving.¹⁸

An appreciation and acceptance of each child's individuality together with an increased awareness on the part of caregivers about how their own styles, likes, dislikes, and expectations affect their responses to the child, represent initial steps in creating a climate for promoting self-esteem. Within this climate it is necessary to have a framework that can serve as a blueprint to guide the development and implementation of specific strategies for reinforcing self-esteem. It is to this framework that we turn.

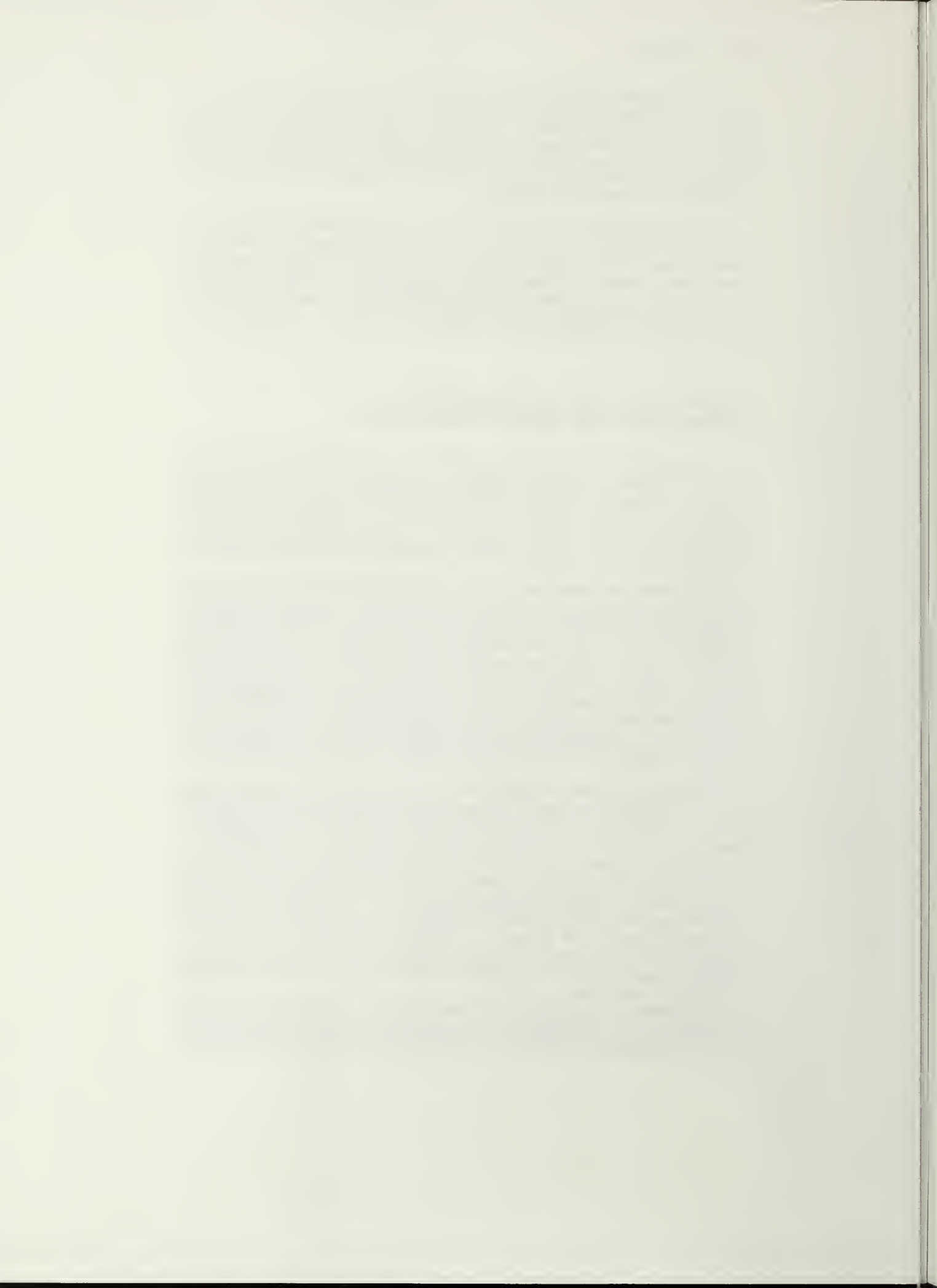
ATTRIBUTION THEORY: A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING AND ASSESSING SELF-ESTEEM

Recognition of the importance of self-esteem in a child's life has stimulated efforts to articulate the major components associated with self-esteem. These efforts have been undertaken not simply as an intellectual exercise but for the purpose of designing strategies for reinforcing a child's sense of worth and competence. One promising approach, initially proposed by Bernard Weiner and applied by many clinicians and researchers, is called "attribution theory."^{11, 20, 28, 31}

This theory examines the causes to which people attribute successes and failures in their lives. Obviously, children encounter numerous challenges as they grow, some of which result in failure, others in success. Children entertain different reasons for why these outcomes occur, reasons that vary from child to child and are strongly linked to self-esteem. In terms of success experiences, research indicates that children with high self-esteem view their success as determined in large part by their own efforts, resources, and abilities. These children take realistic credit for their accomplishments and feel a sense of control over what is transpiring in their lives. They are typically children who experience mastery early in life within a responsive and encouraging environment.⁹

In contrast, children and adolescents who have encountered many frustrations and disappointments and whose self-esteem has suffered erosion are inclined to believe that their achievements are predicated on luck or chance or fate, on factors outside their control, thereby weakening their confidence in being able to succeed again in the future. For instance, many children with learning difficulties are quick to dismiss a good test performance with such comments as, "The teacher made the test easy" or "I was lucky." One child who did not feel very competent in playing Little League baseball responded to getting a base hit by saying, "The pitcher threw the ball soft to me." Strikingly absent in these children is the belief that they played a role in achieving their success. The cumulative effect of perceived failure outweighs any success experiences.

Self-esteem also is implicated in how children understand the mistakes and failures that they experience. As a matter of fact, one way that I typically assess the self-esteem of my child and adolescent patients is by asking parents



and teachers to describe how these patients respond to failure. As an illustration, two students in the same third grade class have failed a spelling test. Walking out of the class, one child thinks, "I can do better than this. I have to study more next time, maybe ask the teacher for extra help." The second child leaves the classroom in anger, muttering, "The teacher stinks. He never told us that these words would be on the test." Or, to take another example, after striking out in a Little League game one player asks the coach for extra help, whereas the other storms off, accusing the umpire of being blind.

The first child in each example, the one who is willing to seek extra help or work more diligently, basically believes that mistakes are experiences to learn from rather than feel defeated by. Such children typically attribute unsuccessful ventures to variables that are within their power to change, such as lack of effort—especially if the task is realistically achievable—or ineffective strategies (e.g., poor study habits). The second child in each example demonstrates low self-esteem, resorting to blaming others to hide the painful feeling that "I am a failure, I cannot change, I cannot do better." Rather than believing that mistakes are a basis for learning and growth, children with low self-esteem often experience each new mistake as another rock being placed around their necks, weighing them down more and more. These children perceive mistakes as resulting from conditions that are unmodifiable, such as lack of ability or low intelligence, a perception that contributes to a state of helplessness.^{1,9} If their low self-esteem pervades many areas and activities of their lives, leaving little room for satisfaction, their emotional burden and despair will be intense. This overpowering sense of inadequacy makes future success less likely because these children, expecting failure, begin to retreat from age-expected demands or handle these demands in a perfunctory and ineffective manner.

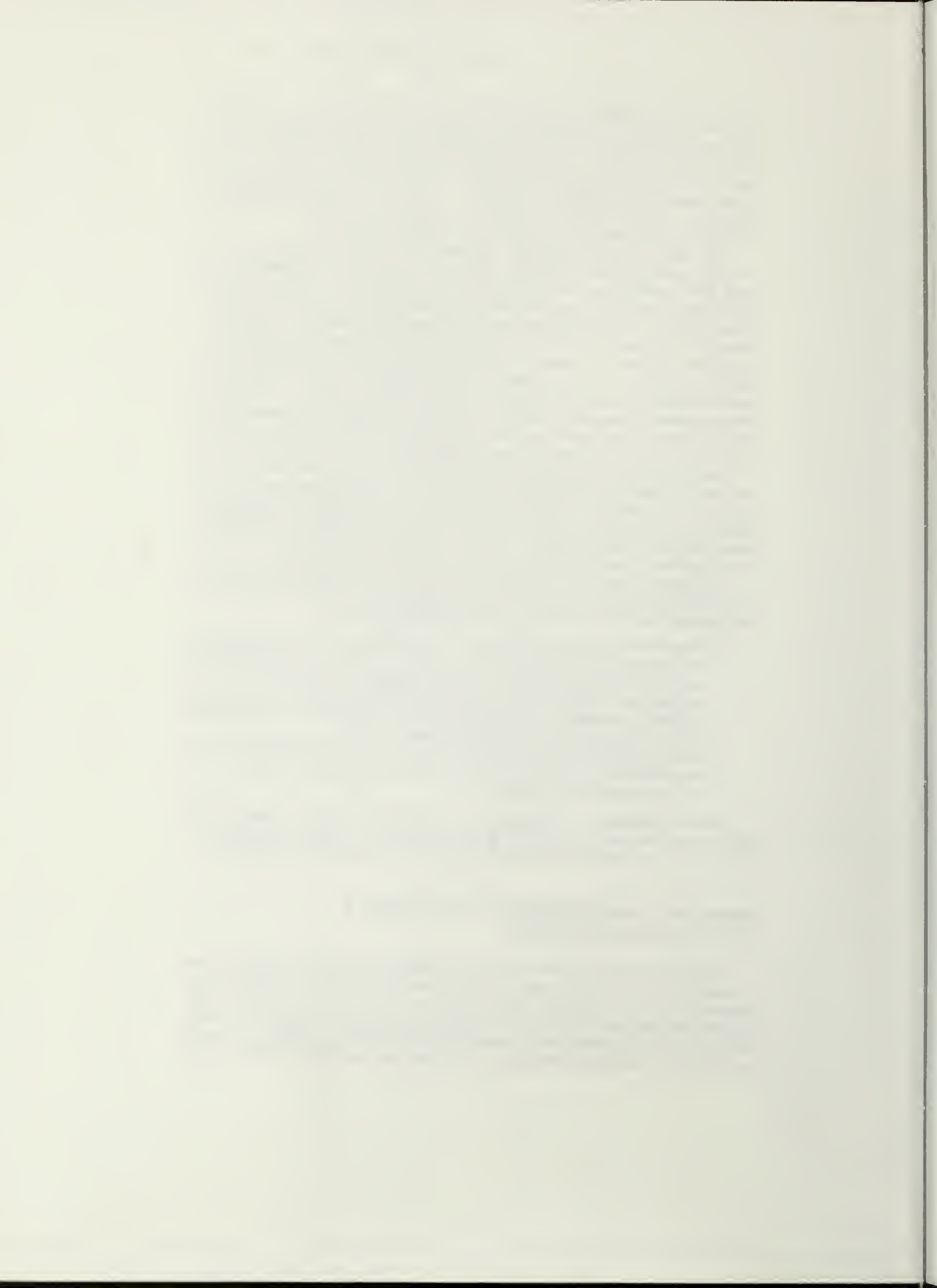
Attribution theory has far-reaching implications for designing strategies for reinforcing the self-esteem of children and adolescents. It serves to direct those who raise or work with youth to ask the following questions:

1. How do we create an environment in schools and homes that maximizes the probability that children will not only succeed but that they will experience their achievements as based in great measure on their own abilities and efforts? Stated somewhat differently, how do we assist children to assume an increasing sense of ownership and responsibility for the events that transpire in their lives?
2. How do we create an environment that reinforces the belief in children that mistakes often form the very basis for learning, that mistakes are not only *accepted* but *expected*?

Before considering these questions, the behavioral manifestations of self-esteem are described, with special focus on the ways in which the particular coping strategies used by children serve as reflections of their self-esteem.

BEHAVIORAL MANIFESTATIONS OF SELF-ESTEEM: A LOOK AT COPING STRATEGIES

Parents and teachers often ask how self-esteem in children and adolescents is assessed. To undertake such an assessment one must be empathic and attempt to see the world through the eyes of the child. Observations from parents and teachers, responses to interview questions and projective tests, and the use of storytelling and storywriting all can yield important data about a child's inner world and self-image.^{7,8} Because children and adolescents may



experience different levels of self-esteem depending on the activity in which they are engaged, I always attempt to obtain information about self-esteem across a number of domains of the child's life. (Parenthetically, I should note that to evaluate and promote empathy in parents as well as to gather additional information about the child, I ask parents during the diagnostic phase to describe a typical day in their child's life, but to do so as if they were their son or daughter. In their descriptions I ask them to consider the possible determinants of their child's behavior as well as how the child perceives them. I use similar questions with the child's teachers. Their responses help me to gain a clearer picture not only of the child, but also of the child's caregivers.)

With some children there is little doubt that their self-esteem is low, especially in certain areas; for example, teachers and parents report that these children call themselves stupid or dumb. I once saw Wendy, a 7-year-old girl, in therapy. Wendy had attentional problems and was referred by her parents because of her seeming underachievement and problems focusing on her work. In therapy, Wendy was invited to write a story about what it felt like to have trouble paying attention and learning. Wendy agreed and decided to have as the main character a dog named "Hyper" who had difficulty concentrating, an obvious representation of herself. The issue of low self-esteem was immediately evident in Wendy's second paragraph, which read: "Hyper told herself that she would get over this problem someday, but she wondered if she really would. She was worried that when she grew up and her own puppies asked her something, she would not know the answer and they would wonder why their mother was not very smart." Wendy was not only portraying a picture of low self-esteem but also a fear expressed by many children who lack confidence, namely, that the situation would never improve.

Frequently, low self-esteem is not expressed directly or in an undisguised fashion. Instead, it can be inferred from the particular coping strategies used by children in their struggles to manage stress and pressure and bolster their self-esteem. Children with high self-esteem tend to use coping maneuvers that are adaptive and in the service of growth and mastery. Examples would be a child experiencing peer problems who is making a concerted effort to engage classmates in a more considerate way, or a child having difficulty with long division who asks for extra help, or a child who has trouble catching a baseball who spends additional time practicing this skill. In contrast, children with low self-esteem are likely to rely on coping behaviors that are not very adaptive, effective, or appropriate, behaviors that are self-defeating, represent retreat from problems, and add to the child's plight.

It is beyond the scope of this article to consider a number of important questions about coping strategies such as "How do they develop?" "How stable are they over time?" "How does one assess how effective or ineffective they are and does their effectiveness vary from situation to situation?" "Are they used voluntarily or are they beyond the control of the child?" A number of books and articles address these important questions.^{3 16 22 23} For the purpose of this article I have selected to describe commonly used and sometimes overlapping coping strategies that are typically counterproductive and indicative of low self-esteem (Table 1).

Quitting. Some children become frustrated when they cannot master a task or win a game and consequently quit, often offering an excuse such as the task or game is boring.

Avoiding. This coping behavior is related to quitting. The main difference is that in quitting the child has begun to attempt the task but retreats when things are not going well. Avoidance indicates that the child has refused to

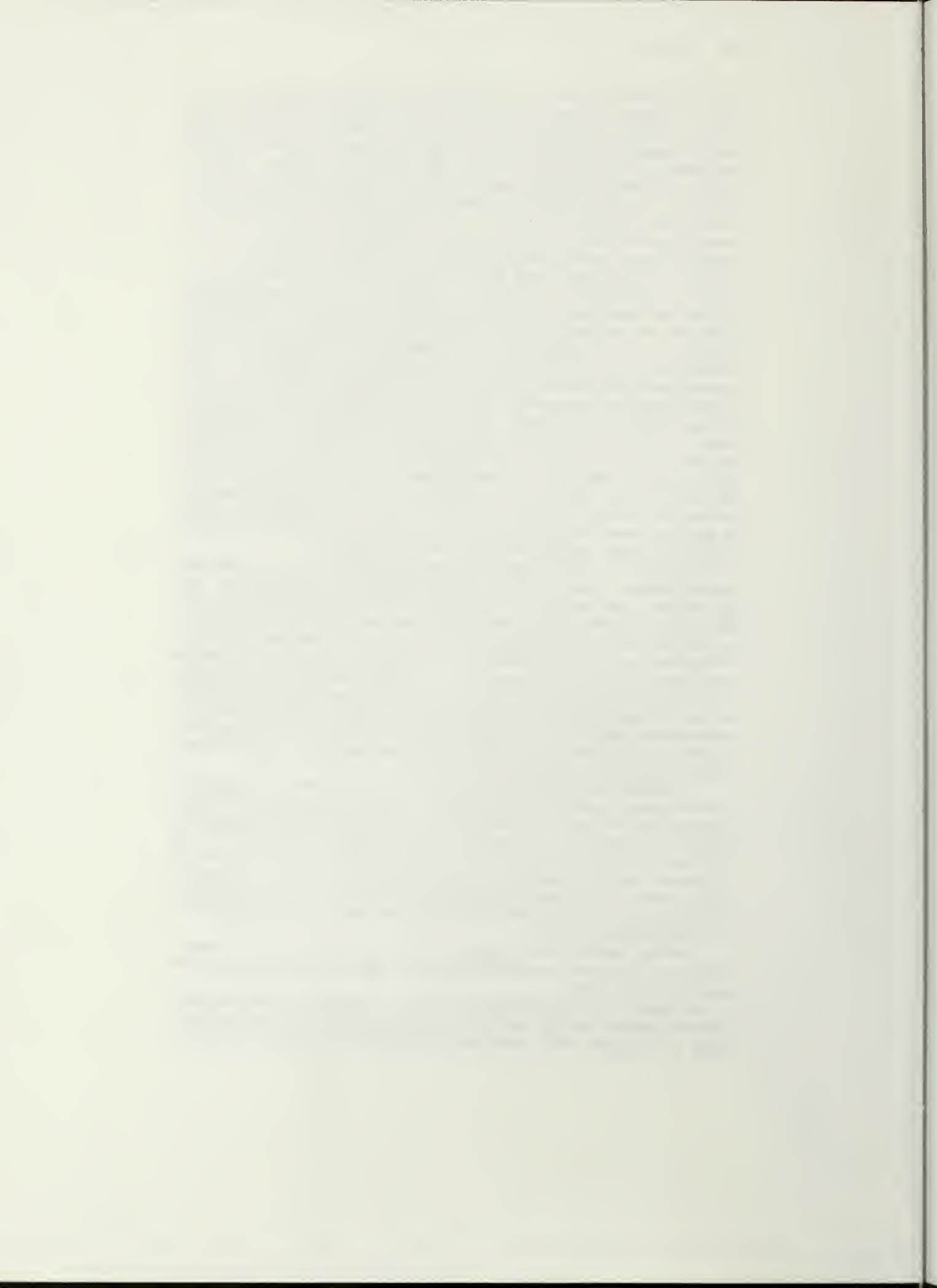


Table 1. COUNTERPRODUCTIVE COPING STRATEGIES

Quitting	Being aggressive and bullying
Avoiding	Being passive-aggressive
Cheating	Denying
Clowning or regressing	Rationalizing
Controlling	Being impulsive

become involved at all. An example is a child who does not try out for a part in a play, worried about looking foolish and failing.

Cheating. Some children are so certain that they cannot win at a game or pass a test that they begin to alter the rules or copy answers. For instance, a patient of mine often shifted the order of his cards while playing War, especially to avoid losing picture cards. When I asked about this behavior, he resorted to another coping strategy, rationalization (see later discussion), excusing his shifting of cards by contending that it was fair because I was older than he was—not a valid reason because the game is based exclusively on luck, not skill or experience.

Clowning and Regressing. Some children who lack confidence believe that they will only be noticed and gain attention if they act silly and clown around. Clowning also may be used to minimize the seeming importance of failure in a certain situation. As with other self-defeating coping behaviors, clowning and regression often lead to ridicule by others.

Controlling. As attribution theory indicates, many children with low self-esteem believe that they have little control over their own lives so that a sense of helplessness is not uncommon. In response, such children often attempt to take command, telling others what to do. For example, one of my patients constantly fought with his parents about what time to go to bed; similarly, during recess at school he attempted to dictate what games should be played.

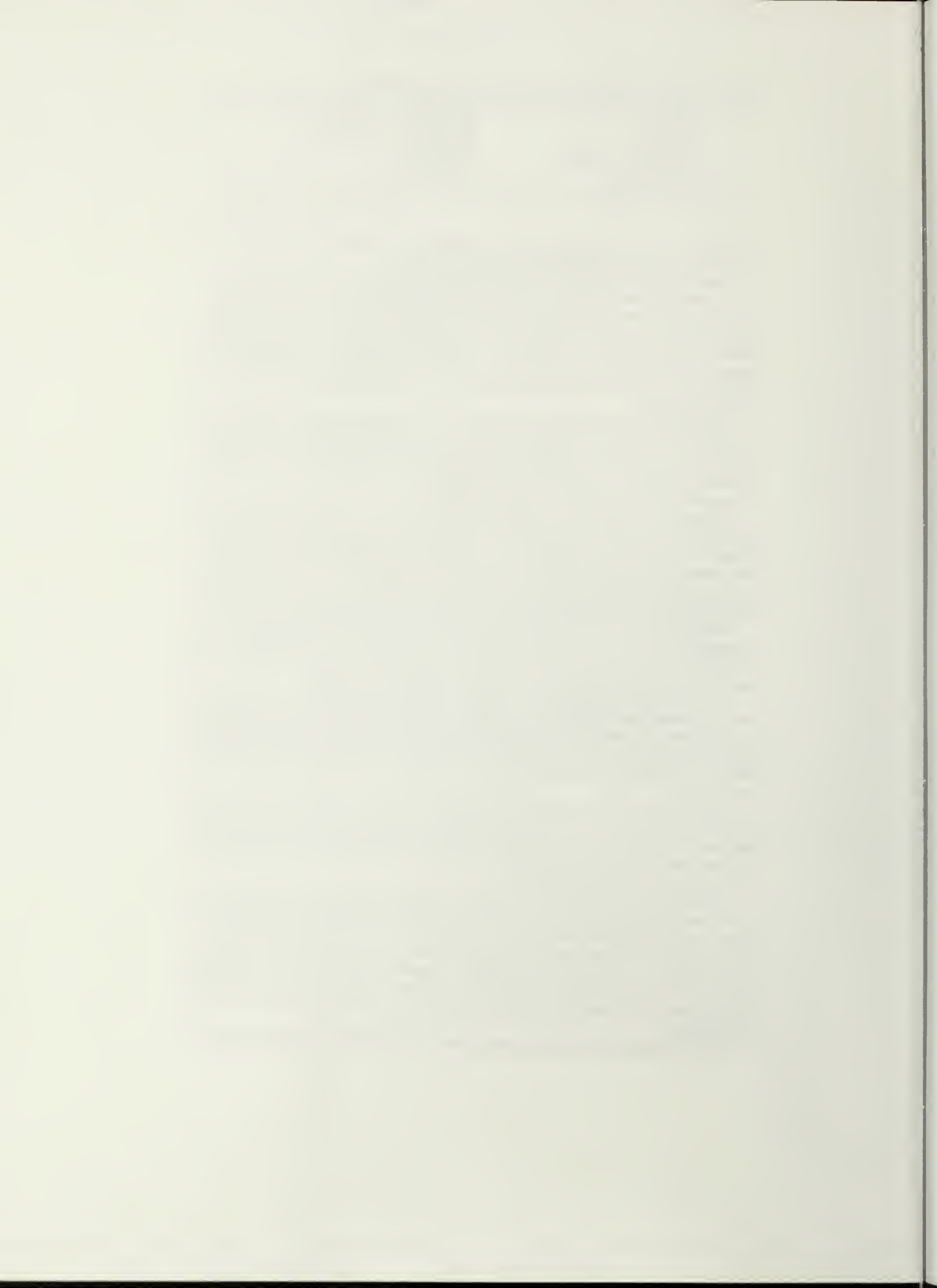
Being Aggressive and Bullying. A very common counterproductive way of coping is to deal with frustration and low self-esteem by striking out at others. Children who use aggression in this way are desperately hiding their own feelings of inadequacy by belittling or scapegoating others.

Being Passive-Aggressive. Another behavior used to exert control falls under the description passive-aggressive. Children who use this way of coping may promise to meet certain responsibilities, but "forget" to do so. Passive-aggressive behavior also may earn the child the label "oppositional," although other behaviors on this list of coping strategies also would prompt such a description.

Denying. It is not unusual for children with low self-esteem to use denial as a way of dealing with the pain that might result if they were to acknowledge their limitations and vulnerabilities. They may deny that they are worried about a school assignment, that they care about how things in their life are going, or that they did not do their homework.

Rationalizing. This strategy is frequently used by children and adolescents. It involves offering excuses for perceived difficulties and failure rather than accepting responsibility because these children do not believe they are capable of succeeding. At times, rationalization takes the form of *externalizing*, that is, blaming other people or external events for unsatisfactory outcomes. Examples might include a child saying a test is stupid after failing the test or a child arguing that classmates are unfair and mean in order to explain poor peer relationships.

Being Impulsive. Although impulsivity may be seen as a characteristic of



a child's temperament, it also may represent a way of coping. It is not unusual for some children to want to finish a challenging task or burdensome chore as quickly as possible "just to get it over with."

It is important to emphasize that even coping behaviors that are counter-productive were originally "recruited" by the child in an attempt to manage stress and to maintain a sense of dignity and self-esteem. Even coping behaviors that are maladaptive represent a protective shield to the child, a shield that cannot swiftly be removed lest the child feel increasingly exposed and vulnerable; such vulnerability may trigger a desperate search for other coping strategies that prove to be even less effective than the original ones so that the problem is exacerbated. If our goal is to help children and adolescents feel secure and confident, we must find ways to replace self-defeating coping maneuvers with behaviors that are adaptive. To do so, we must provide our youth with experiences that strengthen their self-esteem.¹³

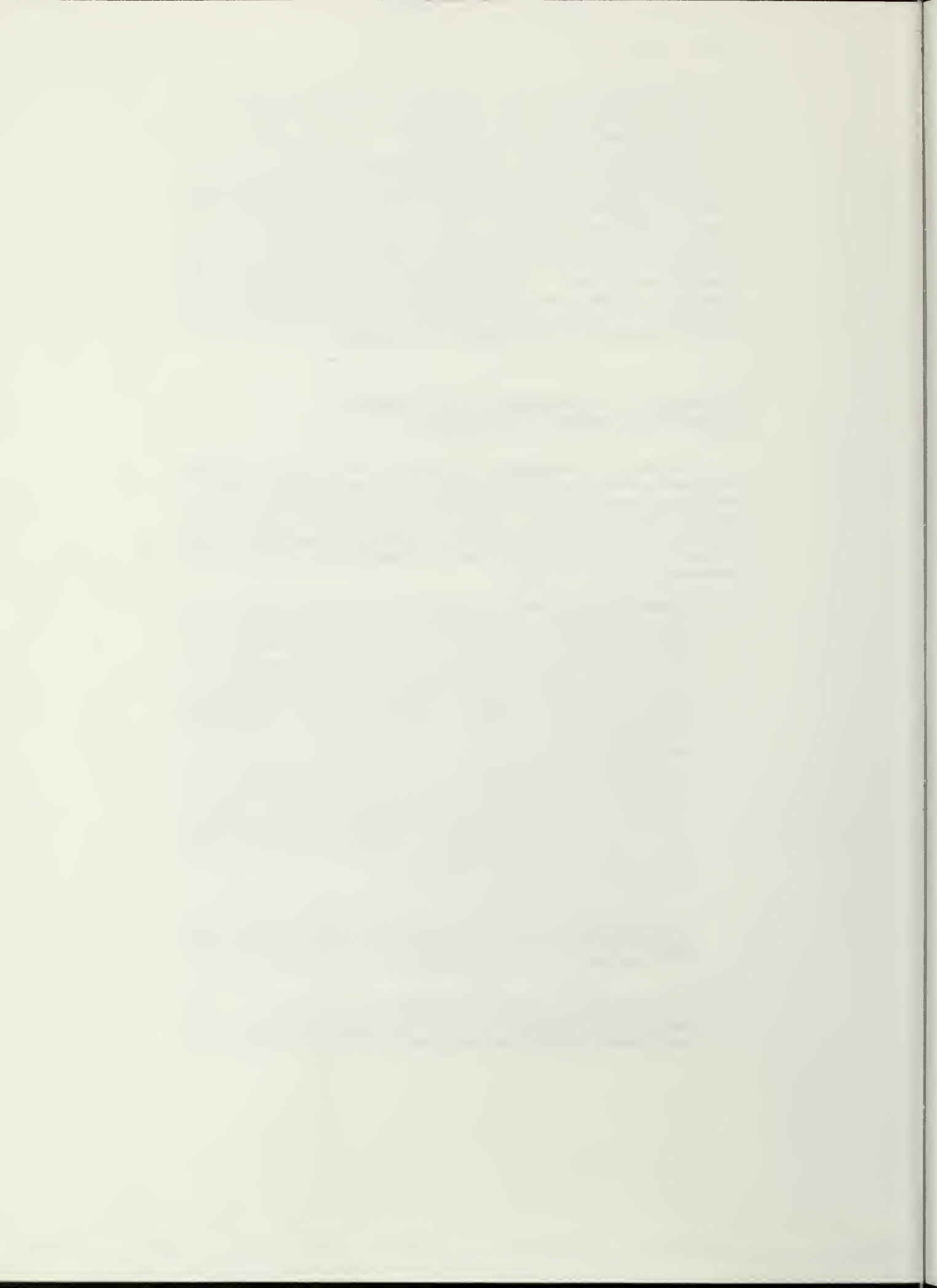
INTERVENTIONS TO REINFORCE SELF-ESTEEM: THE SEARCH FOR ISLANDS OF COMPETENCE

In discussing the implications of attribution theory earlier in this article, two questions were raised about fostering self-esteem, namely, how best to create an environment in which children assume a greater sense of control, ownership, and responsibility for their lives, and how best to help children learn that mistakes are a natural part of the learning process, to be accepted and expected. The strategies that follow are guided by these questions. A few preliminary remarks are necessary.

1. These strategies represent an approach to reinforcing self-esteem that is applicable to all children and adolescents, whether they are encountering learning, behavioral, or emotional difficulties. The strategies can be used in every domain of a child's environment (e.g., home, school).
2. The specific form that any strategy takes should be based on a knowledge of the child's temperament, interests, strengths, vulnerabilities, coping behaviors, and cognitive skills. If interventions are developed that do not consider the unique qualities of the child, they will not be very effective.
3. If these self-esteem strategies are to be successful, the adults using them must convey a sense of hope and caring, a belief that all children and adolescents—regardless of what they have experienced or what hardships they have faced—can become resilient. The importance for children of having at least one adult who believes in them has been captured by psychologist Julius Segal in his review of factors that help children overcome adversity. Segal wrote:

From studies conducted around the world, researchers have distilled a number of factors that enable such children of misfortune to beat the heavy odds against them. One factor turns out to be the presence in their lives of a charismatic adult—a person with whom they identify and from whom they gather strength.²⁰

4. We can all think of children and adolescents who are much more self-assured playing basketball or baseball than they are taking a math examination or talking with their peers, of other youth who are com-



fortable in the classroom but very self-conscious playing a sport, and of still others who are confident working on the motor of a car or painting a picture but dread writing an essay. An individual's self-esteem frequently varies from one situation to the next.

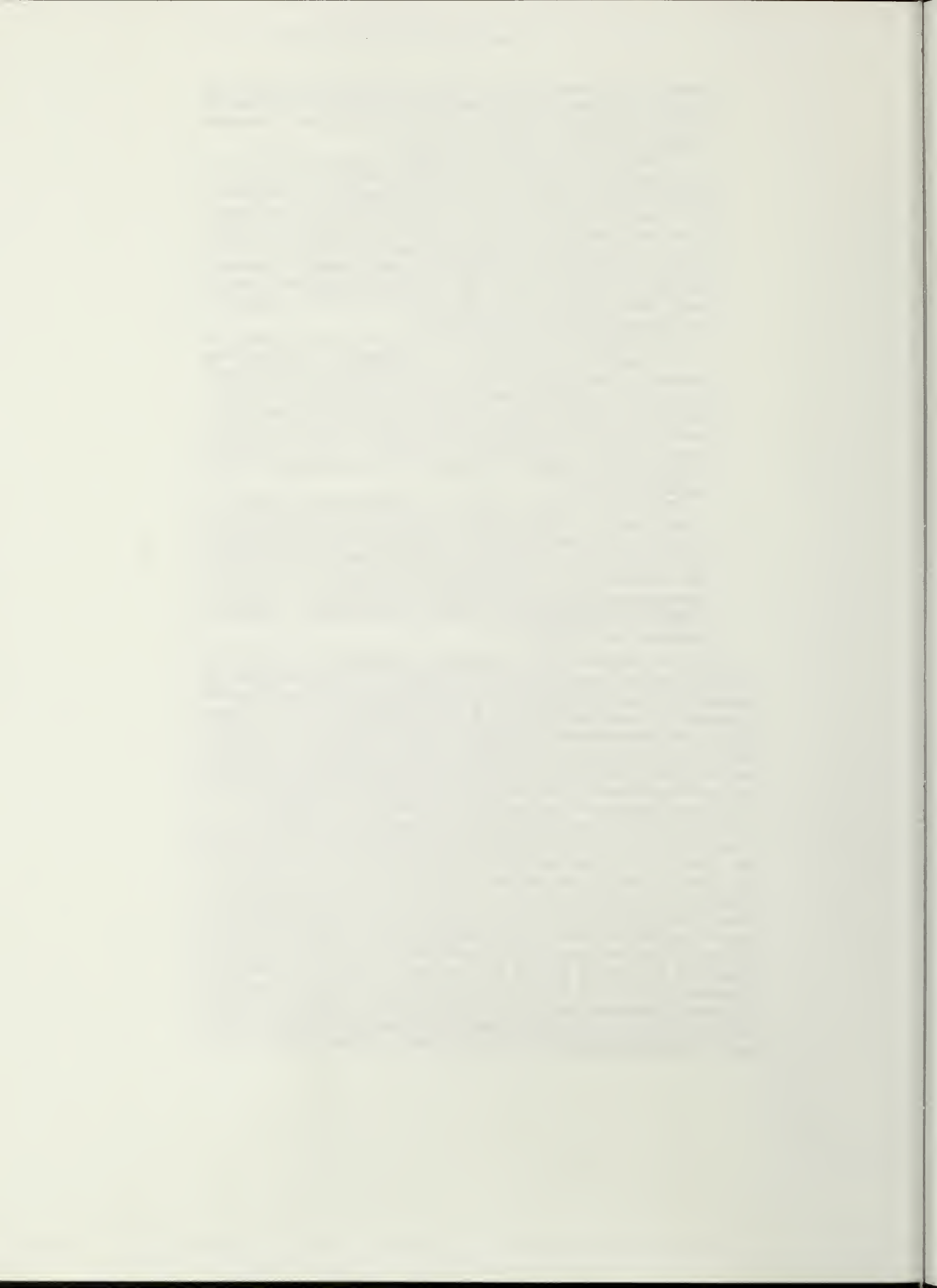
If children and adolescents experience self-doubt and failure in many situations, especially those that they judge to be important to significant others, their overall sense of competence and confidence is low. I use a metaphor to capture this feeling involving an image in which I see many, if not all, of my patients swimming or drowning in an ocean of self-perceived inadequacy. They have communicated to me in many ways that they doubt that they can be successful. To counteract this image of despair, I believe that every person possesses at least one small "island of competence," one area that is or has the potential to be a source of pride and accomplishment.

This metaphor is not intended to be merely a fanciful image, but rather a symbol of hope and respect: a reminder that all children and adolescents have strengths. Those who are raising and teaching children have the responsibility to locate and build on these islands of competence so that they will become more prominent than the ocean of self-doubt. My experience has been that if we can find and reinforce these areas of strength, we can create a "ripple effect" in which children may be more willing to venture forth and confront situations that have been problematic for them.

There are a number of self-esteem strategies that can make use of a child's islands of competence to develop a solid foundation from which to move to less secure areas of a child's life, strategies predicated on attribution theory. Recognizing the space limitations of this article I have selected five of these strategies as examples of the kinds of interventions that can be implemented to foster self-esteem. The reader is referred to *The Self-Esteem Teacher*¹³ for a more in-depth description of these and other strategies.

Developing Responsibility and Making a Contribution. If children are to develop a sense of ownership and commitment, they must be provided with opportunities for assuming responsibilities, especially those that involve making a contribution to their world (school, home, neighborhood).^{10, 12} For instance, children feel a more positive attachment to school and are more motivated to learn if they believe they are contributing to the school milieu. In this regard, Michael Rutter in his study of British schools found that opportunities for students "to take responsibility and to participate in the running of their school lives appear conducive to good attainments, attendance, and behavior."¹²

Examples of this strategy include (1) an elementary school child who was turned off to school and whose self-perceived island of competence was taking care of his pet dog. Consequently, he was recruited as the "pet monitor" of the school, a position that involved taking care of various pets at school, authoring a brief manual about pet care that was bound and placed in the school library (typically this boy did not like to write, but with the encouragement of his teacher he wrote the pet manual because he felt he had something of value to offer), and lecturing to all classrooms about the care of pets; (2) a hyperactive high school student who was asked to help by becoming the "attendance monitor" of the school, a job that required walking through the halls during homeroom time (he almost never made it to homeroom anyway) to check if there was a teacher present in each classroom and then to report back to the principal (this activity utilized the boy's high activity level in a



positive way and helped him to become more settled and successful at school); (3) a sixth-grade girl whose low self-esteem was masked by her oppositional behavior and her need to control situations. Because she enjoyed interacting with younger children, her self-esteem was enhanced by asking her to tutor first and second graders in school and do some babysitting in the neighborhood (these kinds of responsibilities were also in accord with her need to be in control, but this need was now being expressed in a more constructive fashion); and (4) classrooms that rely on cooperative learning so that students gain experience working together and helping each other.

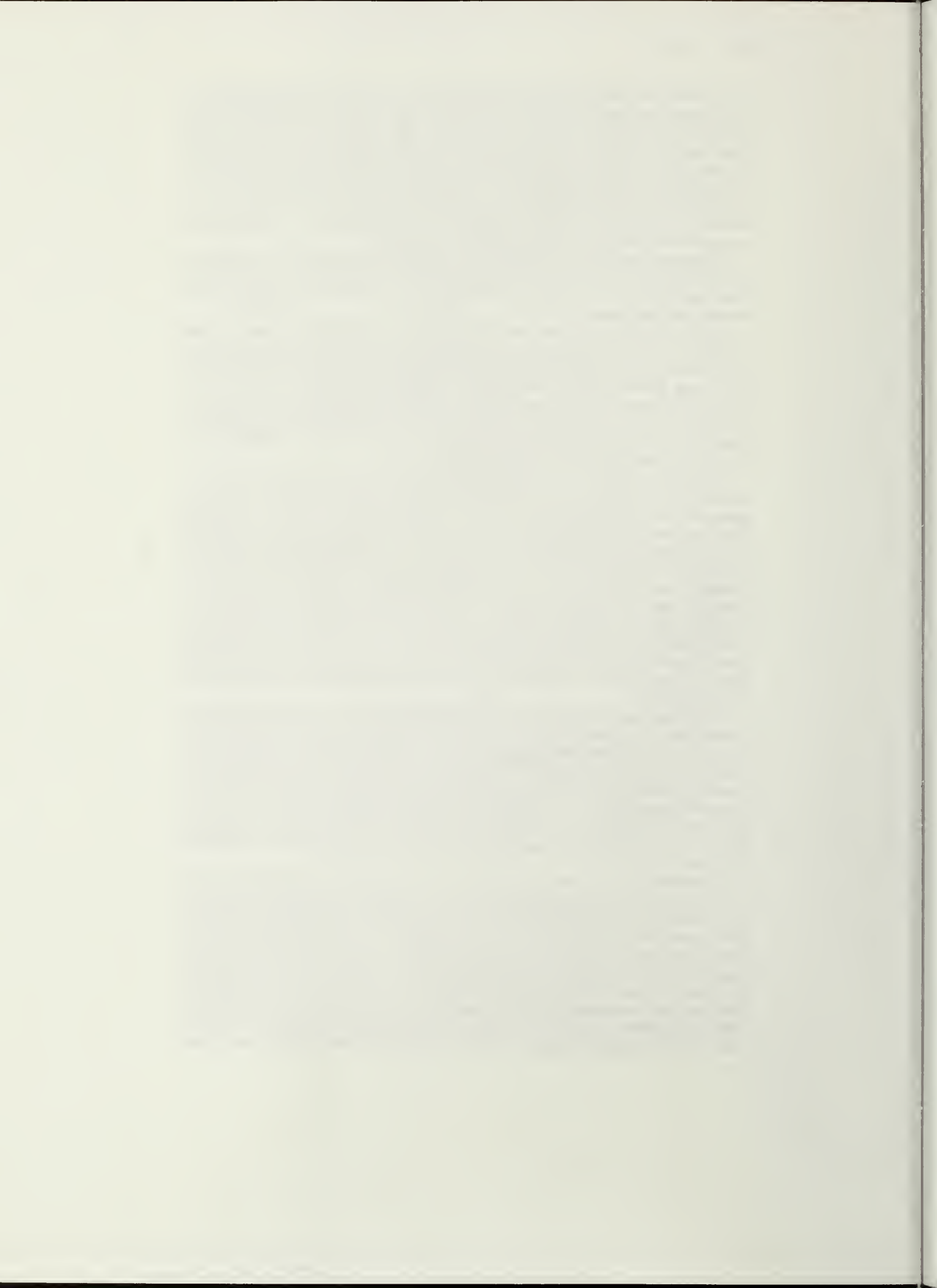
I believe that providing these kinds of "contributory activities" for children and adolescents conveys the message that they are capable individuals who have something of value to offer, a message that will serve to heighten self-esteem and motivation.

Providing Opportunities for Making Choices and Decisions and Solving Problems. A basic component of high self-esteem is the belief that we have some control over what is occurring in our lives and that we can choose options and make decisions about events and situations that affect us.^{2, 17, 19, 24} To reinforce this belief, adults must provide children and adolescents with opportunities to make choices and decisions and to solve problems that impact on their lives. Obviously, these choices and decisions should be in keeping with the child's developmental level and interests.

Examples include (1) a first-grade perfectionistic child with learning disabilities who refused to do any writing because he could not write his letters perfectly. He responded positively when the teacher offered him the option of choosing one "vacation day" each week when he could substitute a nonwriting activity during writing time; (2) students who were given a choice by class vote of what day to take a test; (3) a junior high school girl who often engaged in struggles with her parents about bedtime and was permitted to select one evening each week when she could stay up 30 minutes later; (4) a group of students who did research about and decided on a charity for which they would raise money through a bake sale; and (5) a pediatrician permitting an anxious child to choose whether to have his eyes or ears examined first. All of these activities serve to empower children and adolescents and help them to feel in control.

Offering Encouragement and Positive Feedback. It may seem obvious that self-esteem is nurtured when adults convey appreciation and encouragement to children. Yet it has been my experience that too many homes, schools, and businesses are characterized by an absence of encouragement and praise. The existing philosophy seems to be: "When my children (staff, workers) do something that's good, it is expected and nothing need be said, but when they do something wrong they will hear about it." This philosophy fails to recognize how even a small gesture of appreciation or encouragement can create a potent, positive effect.

Examples of this strategy include (1) a teacher writing a brief note on a child's paper praising the child's efforts; (2) a pediatrician sending a postcard to a child after an examination saying how much the pediatrician enjoyed seeing the child (as long as this is a true feeling); (3) a parent finding a "special time" each week to spend with each child in the family individually. This time might be for 15 to 30 minutes each evening or for a longer period once a week (e.g., for dinner outside the home). I recall a 5-year-old patient who believed that his father was disappointed and angry with him (an accurate assessment). Their relationship improved noticeably when the father scheduled a "private time" once a week with his son, which involved going before school to a donut



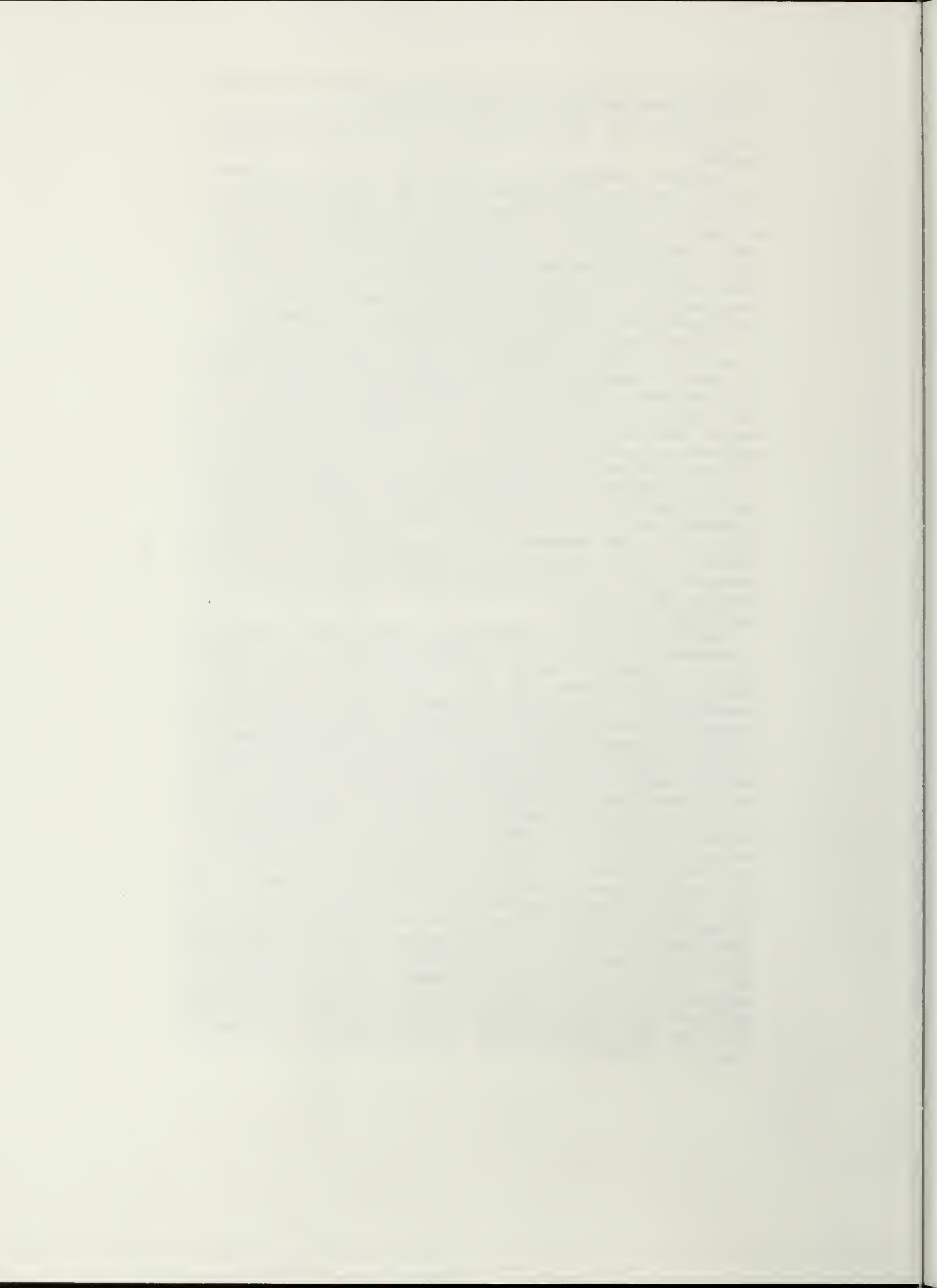
shop for breakfast; and (4) a recognition assembly in school in which a variety of student achievements and contributions were noted.

Regardless of how high our self-esteem, words of encouragement and positive feedback are always welcome and provide energizing sources of motivation.

Establishing Self-Discipline by Creating Guidelines and Consequences. Parents, teachers, and other caregivers often have numerous questions and concerns related to discipline, concerns that are well deserved.²⁴ If children are to develop high self-esteem, they also must possess a secure and comfortable sense of self-discipline, that is, the ability to reason, to reflect upon one's actions, to think about the consequences of one's behavior and the impact one has on others, and to assume accountability for what one does. The words "secure and comfortable" were used to convey the belief that self-discipline is most effective when not laden with feelings of guilt or undue pressure.

The goal of discipline is to teach and educate children, not to ridicule them or punish them harshly. If children are to take ownership for their actions, they must be increasingly involved in the process of understanding and even establishing rules, guidelines, limits, and consequences.² Adults must constantly walk a tightrope, maintaining a delicate balance between being too rigid and too permissive; they must strive to blend warmth, nurturance, and acceptance with realistic expectations, clear-cut rules, and logical consequences. In addition, if children are constantly transgressing, teachers and parents must attempt to understand why and ask if what is being demanded is appropriate for this particular child. Not infrequently, the misbehavior of children is rooted in demands that children experience as arbitrary and forced upon them, demands that arouse resentment and lessen a feeling of effectiveness and autonomy.² As much as possible, adults should focus on ways to prevent misbehavior from occurring rather than expending too much time and effort struggling with what to do and what form of discipline to use once the misbehavior has occurred.

Examples of the effective use of discipline—including those that emphasize a preventive approach with the goal of reinforcing self-esteem—are (1) a teacher who at the beginning of the year asks her students what rules they think should exist in the classroom, why rules are necessary, and what should the consequences be if someone forgets to abide by a rule. Skillfully involving students in the creation of both rules and consequences does not lead to chaos but rather to increased student understanding of the importance of limits and guidelines and greater motivation to follow the rules that they themselves have helped to establish; (2) the hyperactive, young adolescent referred to earlier whose behavior problems at school were lessened when asked to be the "attendance monitor" (an illustration of preventing a discipline problem from emerging by providing a concrete activity to reinforce self-esteem); (3) the assistant principal of a middle school who asked students to write a brief essay while serving detention (they were given the choice of over 30 topics). The topics were all relevant to situations in the students' lives so that in writing about a topic the students were prompted to reflect upon their behavior; and (4) parents of a preschool child who reported that they were having difficulty getting their child to sleep. They found themselves yelling at him, which served only to make matters more tense. In doing a consultation and talking with the child, I discovered that the child was having terrible nightmares and was frightened of going to bed. Greater understanding and empathy on the part of the parents and the use of a nightlight as well as placing a photo of the parents next to the child's bed (interestingly, the child's idea) greatly lessened his anxiety and misbehavior.



Helping Children Feel Okay About Mistakes and Failures. The fear of making mistakes and feeling embarrassed and humiliated is one of the most formidable barriers to meeting challenges and taking risks.¹³ As attribution theory indicates, the development of high self-esteem is intimately related to the belief that mistakes are experiences to learn from rather than feel defeated by. Those who raise and educate children must search for ways to lessen the fear of failure so that children can more comfortably meet developmental challenges and take appropriate risks.

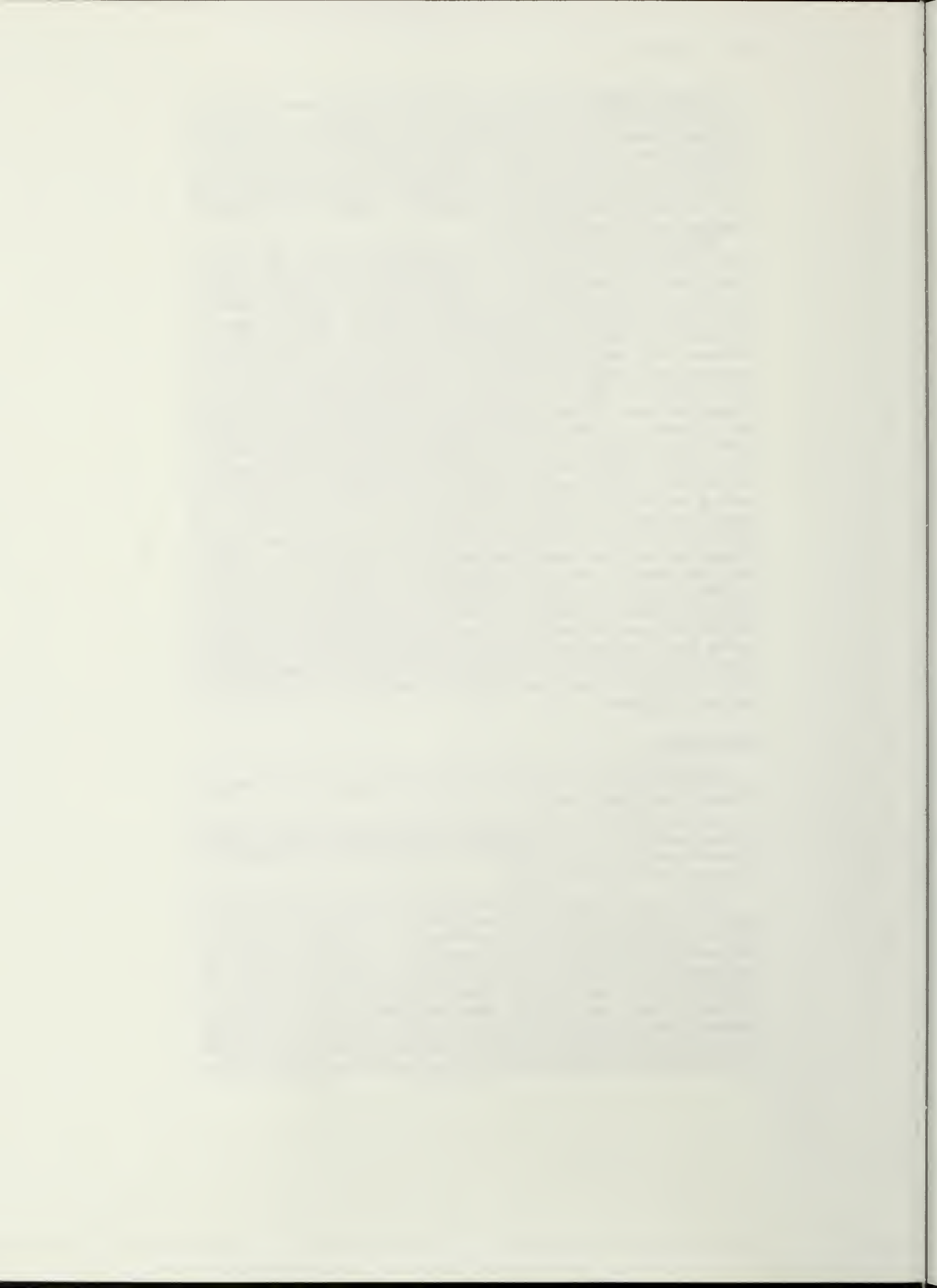
The following are examples of helping children to deal more effectively with mistakes: (1) parents who do not overreact to mistakes their children make, who do not discourage their children by saying, "I told you it wouldn't work!" or "If you would only use your brains!" Instead, assisting children to see what can be learned from the mistake is a much more productive approach; (2) a teacher who during the first or second day of the new school year asks students, "Who feels they will probably make a mistake in class this year or not understand something the first time?" and before anyone can respond the teacher raises her own hand. The teacher can then ask the class why they thought she asked this question and can use their responses as a launching pad to discuss how fears of making mistakes and being humiliated interfere with offering opinions and answers and learning. To acknowledge openly the fear of failure renders it less powerful and less destructive; (3) a teacher who on the first day of class placed an empty jar on her desk and distributed small rocks to her students. She told them that whenever a student "caught" her making a mistake the student was to place one of the rocks in the jar, and when the jar was filled she would provide the class with a treat. What a powerful message about feeling comfortable with making mistakes; (4) adults who share some of their own experiences of growing up and what they personally learned from failing; and (5) adults who emphasize what children are able to do and what they know rather than what they cannot do and what they do not know. For instance, the seemingly simple practice of teachers scoring tests by adding points for correct answers rather than subtracting points (often in red ink) for incorrect answers would focus on the positive. Such a shift in focus might help some children face what they do not know with increased confidence.

CONCLUSION

Self-esteem plays a central role in the lives of all people. As psychologist Nathaniel Branden has noted:

Apart from problems that are biological in origin, I cannot think of a single psychological difficulty . . . that is not traceable to poor self-esteem. Of all the judgments we pass, none is as important as the one we pass on ourselves. Positive self-esteem is a cardinal requirement of a fulfilling life.⁶

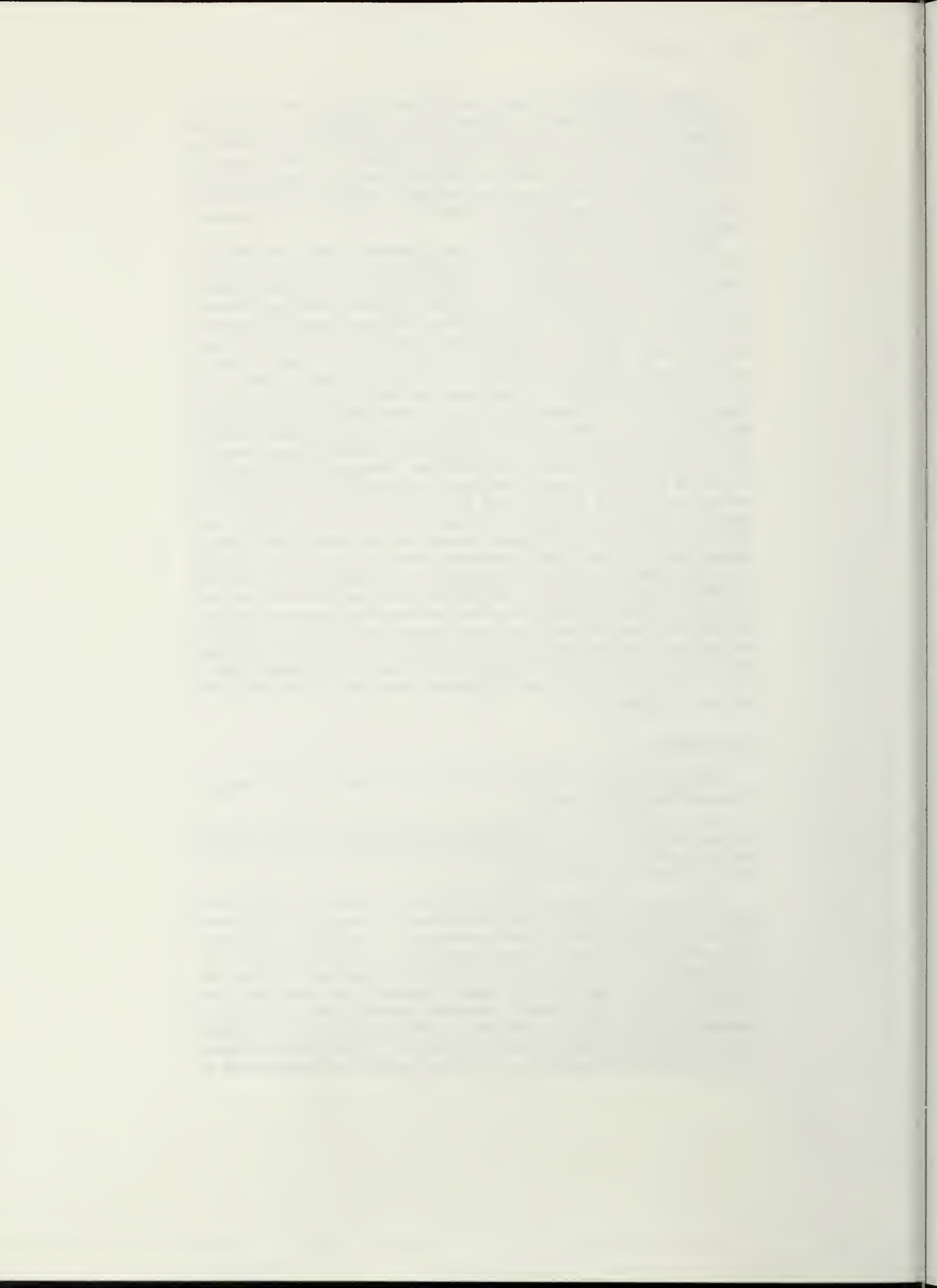
Those of us who interact with children and adolescents must never lose sight of the importance of reinforcing self-esteem in these youth. The difference between a productive life filled with excitement, joy, satisfaction, and accomplishment and a life punctured with despair, envy, underachievement, and self-defeating coping strategies may be based on the presence of at least one "charismatic adult," an adult who shows acceptance and respect and who provides experiences that constantly convey the message, "You are unique and worthwhile, you have much to offer and contribute, and you have the abilities to assume responsibility for what occurs in your life." Children and adolescents who incorporate this message develop high self-esteem and experience life as



a challenge to confront and master rather than as a stress to avoid. It is indeed a wonderful gift that adults can provide.

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NEW YORK

writing, counseling, and teaching others to create families and classrooms where both adults and children feel encouraged and empowered to accept themselves and others and to work together for the good of all. In this book, we have combined our resources to share our ideas about how to change the school environment into an atmosphere of learning and respect.

▼ CHAPTER

I

The Positive Discipline Dream

We have a dream. The dream is about schools where young people are treated with respect and have the opportunity to learn the skills they need for a successful life. The dream is about schools where children will never experience humiliation when they fail but will instead feel empowered by the opportunity to learn from their mistakes. It is a dream about schools where students learn cooperation instead of competition, where students and teachers collaborate on solutions. The dream is about students and teachers helping one another to create an environment that inspires excitement for life and learning, because fear and feelings of inadequacy and discouragement are no longer part of the learning environment. The end result is an educational system that nurtures young people and gives them the skills and attitudes that will help them be happy, contributing members of society.

Many teachers and students have realized this dream by using methods based on mutual respect. Mutual respect

requires that adults see children as people. Teachers who see students as people do not treat them as robots whose only function is to be controlled and manipulated "for their own good." They see students as valuable sources with worthwhile ideas and skills.

Mutual respect is a two-way street. It invites young people to see adults as people who need nurturing and encouragement just as much as students do. A climate for mutual respect is created when teachers allow students to become involved in ways in which they can listen to one another, take each other seriously, and work *together* to solve problems for the benefit of all.

Although there are many methods for teachers and students to work together in a climate of mutual respect, the class meeting provides the greatest potential for teaching children empowering life skills in the least amount of time. Together, students and teachers can create a classroom climate that is nurturing to both self-esteem and academic performance. For this reason, the class meeting is the basis for achieving positive discipline in the classroom and is this book's central organizing principle.

Because we understand the incredible benefits for teachers and students who use class meetings, we are amazed at the resistance from school personnel who have not yet discovered their positive effects. Following are some comments we have heard from teachers and administrators, as they briefed us before in-service trainings:

Teachers don't want you to spend much time on class meetings. They would prefer you talk about involving kids in their education, getting kids to think for themselves and helping teachers deal with acting out students.

Students don't like to sit around in a circle discussing problems. It's not their way.

Don't waste our time on class meetings. Some of us teach classes that are 50 minutes long and we don't have time to waste having meetings.

A well-run class meeting involves students in their education, teaches them to think for themselves, and eliminates most problems with acting-out students. Those who experience belonging and significance through participation in class meetings seldom need to misbehave. (For more about misbehavior, see Chapter 6.) When they do misbehave, students can learn to help each other, usually with more effective results than when they are referred to sources outside the classroom.

Too often, if students are having difficulty in the classroom, it is assumed that there are learning disabilities or behavior problems that exist solely within the students. At other times, it is assumed that the cause lies in their families. It has become popular to "solve" these problems by sending students to the principal, counselor, or school psychologist for referral to a special education program.

When classroom teachers learn to implement effective class meetings, most problems can be successfully handled through the class-meeting process instead of being referred to other sources. Students are taught a fundamental concept: "There are enough of us here to help each other; we don't need to pass the buck." With training, students seem more willing to listen to each other than to adults. Class meetings provide a supportive atmosphere for students to become actively involved in determining their needs and implementing strategies they design to benefit everyone concerned. They can come up with wonderfully creative solutions when given the opportunity.

The Significant Seven

Hundreds of teachers have told us that discipline problems are significantly reduced when they use class meetings. Some teachers may want to implement class meetings for this reason alone. However, we firmly believe that eliminat-

ing discipline problems is only the fringe benefit of class meetings. The major benefits are the social, academic, and life skills students experience, which can be summed up in what we call the *Significant Seven*.¹ The *Significant Seven* are three empowering perceptions and four essential skills, described below.

Three Empowering Perceptions

1. *Perception of personal capabilities*: "I am capable."
2. *Perception of significance in primary relationships*: "I contribute in meaningful ways, and I am genuinely needed."
3. *Perception of personal power of influence over life*: "I can influence what happens to me."

Four Essential Skills

1. *Intrapersonal skill*: the ability to understand personal emotions, to use that understanding to develop self-discipline and self-control, and to learn from experiences.
2. *Interpersonal skill*: the ability to work with others through listening, communicating, cooperating, negotiating, sharing, and empathizing.
3. *Strategic skill*: the ability to respond to the limits and consequences of everyday life with responsibility, adaptability, flexibility, and integrity.
4. *Judgment skill*: the ability to develop wisdom and evaluate situations according to appropriate values.

¹A chapter on each component of the Significant Seven can be found in H. Stephen Glenn and Jane Nelsen, *Raising Self-Reliant Children in a Self-Indulgent World* (Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing, 1989).

Students who are weak in the development of these seven significant perceptions and skills are at high risk for the serious problems of youth, such as drug abuse, teen pregnancy, suicide, delinquency, and gang involvement. Students with strength in the Significant Seven are at low risk for serious problems. Obviously, it is extremely important that young people have the opportunity to develop the Significant Seven, and the class meeting provides an excellent opportunity in the following ways:

1. To develop a *perception of personal capability*, young people need a safe climate where they can experiment with learning and behavior without judgments about success or failure, right or wrong. The class meeting can provide a safe climate where students can examine their behavior, discover how it affects others, and engage in effective problem solving.
2. To develop a *perception of significance in primary relationships*, young people need the experience of having others listen to their feelings, thoughts, and ideas and take them seriously. In class meetings, everyone has the opportunity to voice opinions and give suggestions. Students learn that they can contribute significantly to the problem-solving process and can successfully follow through on chosen suggestions.
3. To develop a *perception of power and influence over their lives*, young people need to experience an environment that emphasizes accountability and encouragement. Class meetings provide a place where kids know it's okay to make mistakes and learn from them. Students learn that it's safe to take responsibility for their mistakes, because they will not be judged. They learn to give up the victim mentality of blaming others ("The teacher gave me an F") and accept



an accountability mentality ("I received an F because I didn't do the work"). They also learn that even when they can't control what happens, they *can* control their response to what happens and their choice of resulting actions.

4. Class meetings provide an excellent opportunity for the development of *intrapersonal skills*. Young people seem more willing to listen to one another than to adults. They gain understanding of their personal emotions and behavior by hearing feedback from their classmates. In a nonthreatening climate, young people are willing to be accountable for their actions. They learn to separate their feelings from their actions and the results of their actions. They can learn that what they feel (anger, for instance) is separate from what they do (hit someone), and that while feelings are always acceptable, some actions are not. They develop self-discipline and self-control by following through with consequences or suggestions from other students.

5. Class meetings provide the best possible opportunity for young people to develop *interpersonal skills* through dialogue and sharing, listening and empathizing, cooperation, negotiation, and conflict resolution. Instead of stepping in and resolving problems for students, teachers can suggest putting the problem on the class meeting agenda, where they can work on a win/win solution together.

6. During class meetings, young people develop excellent *strategic skill* by responding to the limits and consequences of everyday life with responsibility, adaptability, flexibility, and integrity. Through the problem-solving process, they learn alternative ways to express or deal with their thoughts or feelings.

7. Young people develop *judgmental skill* only when they have opportunities and encouragement

to practice making choices and decisions in an environment that emphasizes the process of trying rather than the success or failure of the attempt. A class meeting is just such an environment. Too many adults expect children to develop wisdom and sound judgment without the opportunity to practice, make mistakes, learn, and try again. Regular class meetings give young people a lot of practice time.

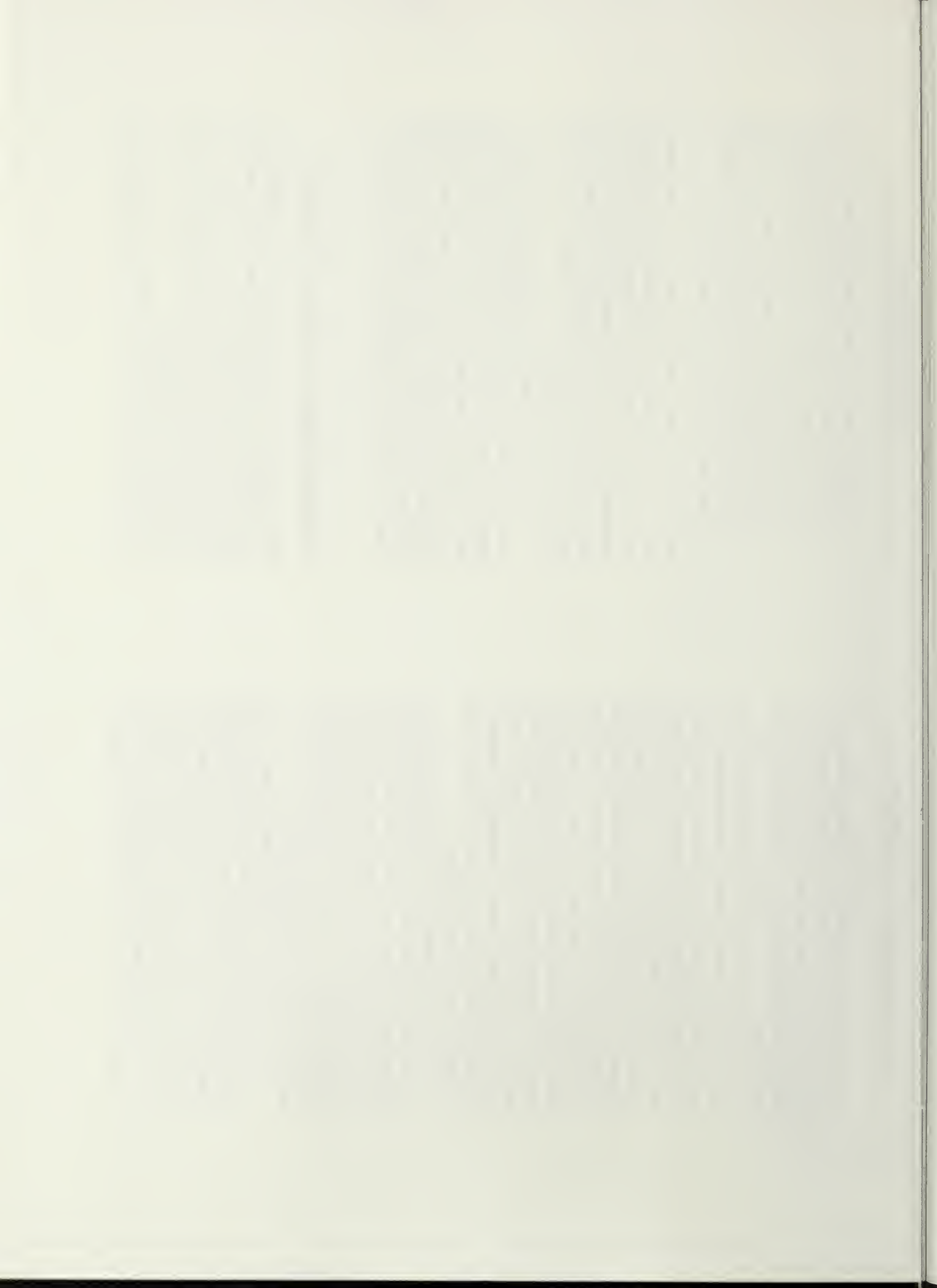
When teachers understand the relevance of the Significant Seven, they know how important it is to provide students with opportunities to develop strength in these empowering perception and essential skill areas. A foundation of mutual respect and student involvement is imperative. The old methods of punishment, humiliation, and control do not work.

It is a rare teacher who does *not* see the value of teaching the skills and attitudes we have discussed in our dream to empower young people. Most teachers would prefer to give up punishment and external control if they had the skills to help students learn self-control, self-discipline, responsibility, and problem-solving skills. However, making the changes necessary to realize the dream may not be easy for teachers or for students.

Positive Change for Future Dividends

Many teachers are accustomed to directing students, and many students are used to being directed by teachers. It takes time to break ineffective habits and replace them with empowering habits. Expect some reluctance, as you begin the process of helping students develop the capacity to solve their own problems.

One of the most difficult changes for some teachers is seeing the value of taking ten to thirty minutes out of



their academic schedule to spend on class meetings. Conversely, teachers who have experienced the short- and long-range benefits wonder how they survived without these meetings. We understand the time required for class meetings and the demands placed on school personnel who have limited time in any given day to devote to what they consider "nonacademic" activities. But the benefits to both students and teachers are well worth the time and training it takes to learn effective class-meeting skills.

Some classroom teachers are reluctant to start one more new thing. Others think they will be giving up too much control. Teachers who think class meetings take too much time away from academic learning forget how much time they waste every day handling discipline problems that could be handled more effectively in a class meeting. We talked with a fourth-grade teacher who had all these objections. She said:

When our school psychologist gave me a copy of *Positive Discipline* and wanted me to implement class meetings, my initial reaction was, "Oh, no. This is another program that I'm going to have to read, and it's not going to work." No one could have a more negative attitude to this than I did, but I decided to try it anyway. After one week, I was sold.

This teacher admitted that before she implemented class meetings, she was in the psychologist's office several times a week for help with her many problem students. She seldom goes to the psychologist anymore. She and her students are solving problems and helping each other.

We cannot sufficiently stress the importance of student participation in the problem-solving process to create cooperation, collaboration, positive motivation, and healthy self-esteem. How could this not improve the academic climate? Class meetings provide a solid base for the teaching, retention, and positive application of academic learning. Understanding this basic fact requires

an understanding of long-range results instead of short-term convenience.

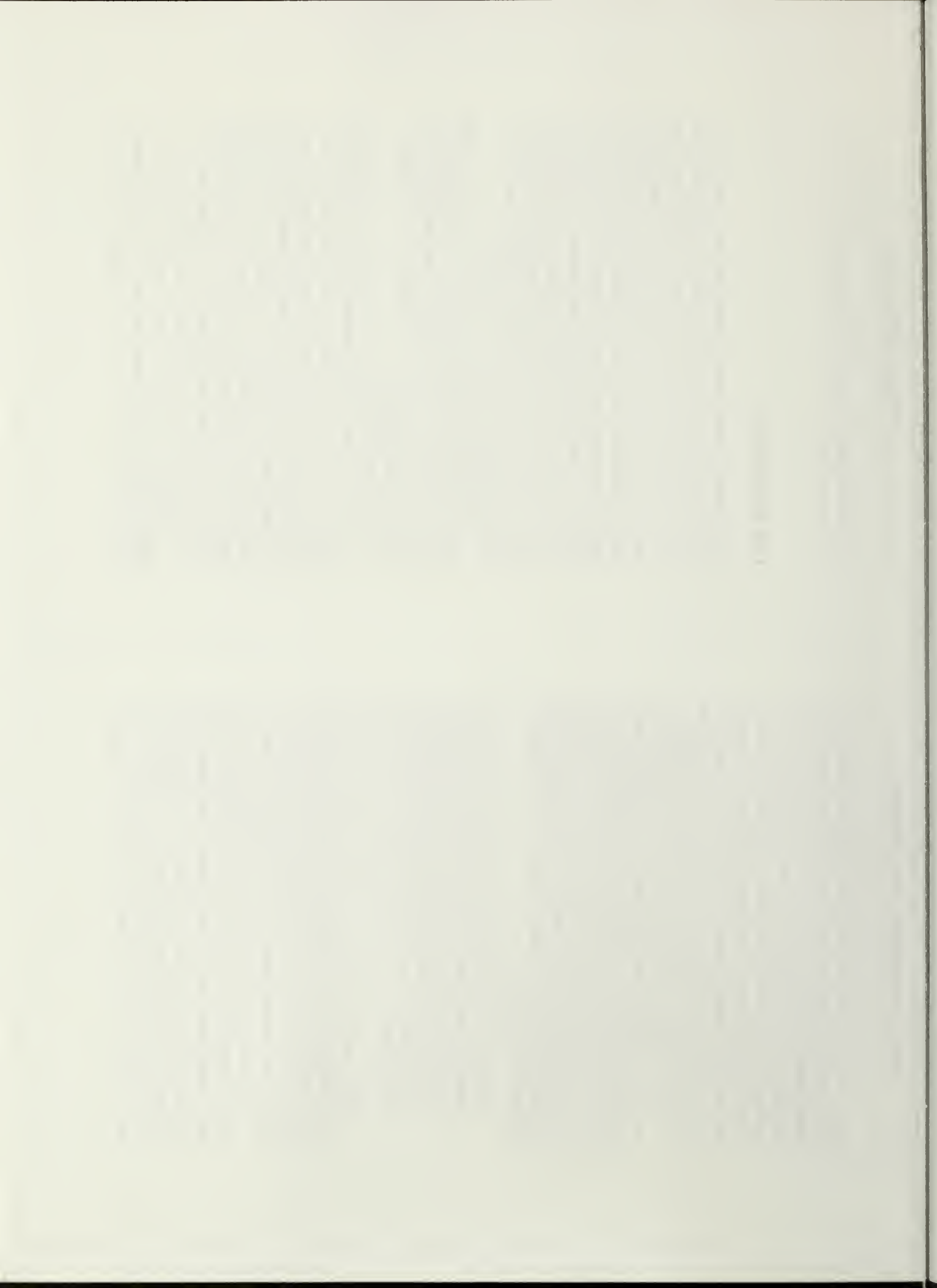
The Big Picture

All too often, school administrators and teachers do not see the big picture for young people. They overlook the crucial need for the development of life skills. They rely (often futilely) on external control instead of taking the time and energy to help students learn control from within. Teachers often choose a punishment/reward system (external controls) because they believe that it teaches children responsibility. However, this system actually makes the *teacher* responsible, not the students. It is the teacher's responsibility to catch students being *good* and reward them, or catch them being *bad* and punish them. What happens when the teacher is not around?

Another illusion perpetuated by the external-control system is that it works. It is true that punishment will usually stop misbehavior for a while, and rewards will often serve as motivators. But how many positive long-range results are there? None.

We often hear this question from teachers: "What can I do when the student has such a terrible home life?" The answer is, "A lot." Young people have several major influences in their lives: home, school, peer group, and (sometimes) church. Teachers cannot do anything directly about the home or church lives of students, but they can have a direct, positive impact on school and peer group experiences—a large portion of a student's day. The skills and attitudes learned by students have a ripple effect in to the playground, the community, and the home.

Teachers do not have to feel overwhelmed by the responsibility of their power to nurture and influence students. The beauty of the class-meeting process is that



▼ CHAPTER 2

teachers do not have to do it all alone. Through class meetings, students learn to help one another. Everyone benefits. Responsible citizenship requires a high degree of social interest—the desire and ability to contribute in socially useful ways and not participate in antisocial behavior. In class meetings, students solve problems together and learn the tools of mutual respect, cooperation, and collaboration. They experience positive power, and this empowerment reduces their need to act out and create discipline problems in order to feel powerful.

Putting It All Together

Teachers who wish to replace authoritarian methods with democratic ones will focus on long-range results instead of short-term convenience. When teachers have faith in themselves and their students and are willing to believe that skills can be learned, successful class meetings will likely result. Class meetings are effective when teachers are willing to give up control *over* students in favor of gaining cooperation *with* students. Teachers who learn how to ask more questions and give fewer lectures develop a real curiosity about their students' thoughts and opinions. When kids are encouraged to express their opinions, are given choices instead of edicts, and can use group problem solving, the classroom atmosphere improves as it becomes one of cooperation, collaboration, and mutual respect. The dream can become a reality.

The Message of Caring

We have established that the class meeting process is the foundation for positive discipline in the classroom. Unless we create an atmosphere of love and caring, the foundation is built on sand.

A group of middle school students were asked, "What usually happens when you get in trouble at school?" The kids responded with various answers, including detention, Saturday school, lunch detention, suspension, extra homework, getting yelled at, being grounded or beaten up at home, having parents come to school and sitting with them to embarrass them, or referral (which they defined as getting sent to the office to listen to a speech).

They were then asked, how many of them had experienced any of those consequences. Two out of ten had been beaten up at home for poor behavior in school. Five had had their parents come to school. Every one had served detention, been grounded, been yelled at, or received extra homework. At least seven out of ten had

1. The first part of the paper discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for the success of any business and for the protection of the interests of all parties involved.

2. The second part of the paper describes the various methods used to collect and analyze data. It includes a detailed discussion of the different types of data that can be collected and the various techniques used to analyze this data.

3. The third part of the paper discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for the success of any business and for the protection of the interests of all parties involved.

4. The fourth part of the paper describes the various methods used to collect and analyze data. It includes a detailed discussion of the different types of data that can be collected and the various techniques used to analyze this data.

5. The fifth part of the paper discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for the success of any business and for the protection of the interests of all parties involved.

6. The sixth part of the paper describes the various methods used to collect and analyze data. It includes a detailed discussion of the different types of data that can be collected and the various techniques used to analyze this data.

7. The seventh part of the paper discusses the importance of maintaining accurate records of all transactions. It emphasizes that proper record-keeping is essential for the success of any business and for the protection of the interests of all parties involved.

8. The eighth part of the paper describes the various methods used to collect and analyze data. It includes a detailed discussion of the different types of data that can be collected and the various techniques used to analyze this data.

received lunch detention, Saturday school, and suspension. When asked if these interventions helped them do better in school, they said, "No!" in unison. When asked if these interventions helped them feel loved, cared for, and motivated to cooperate, the students laughed and replied, "What do you think?"

"Why do you think growups do these kinds of things if they don't help?" we continued. "Because they like the power," some answered. "You don't think they do it because they care about you and want to help you do better?" The kids just laughed.

Dr. James Tunney, a former educator and NFL referee, did a study for his doctoral dissertation to measure levels of perceived caring.¹ He first surveyed principals with the question, "Do you care about your teachers?" The principals always reported high levels of caring. Dr. Tunney then surveyed the teachers and found that if they perceived extremely low levels of caring from their principals,

The next step was to ask the teachers, "Do you care about your students?" Of course, the teachers reported high levels of caring about the students. But guess what? The students perceived extremely low levels of caring from their teachers.

During in-service training, when we ask the teachers how many of them care about kids, just about every hand goes up. Then we ask how many think the kids *know* they care, and, though fewer hands are raised, most teachers still believe students are getting the message. Unfortunately, as Dr. Tunney's research shows, very few kids believe teachers care about them unless they are A students who

¹James Joseph Tunney and James Mancel Jenkins, "A Comparison of Climate as Perceived by Selected Students, Faculty and Administrators in PASCL, Innovative and Other High Schools," Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1975.

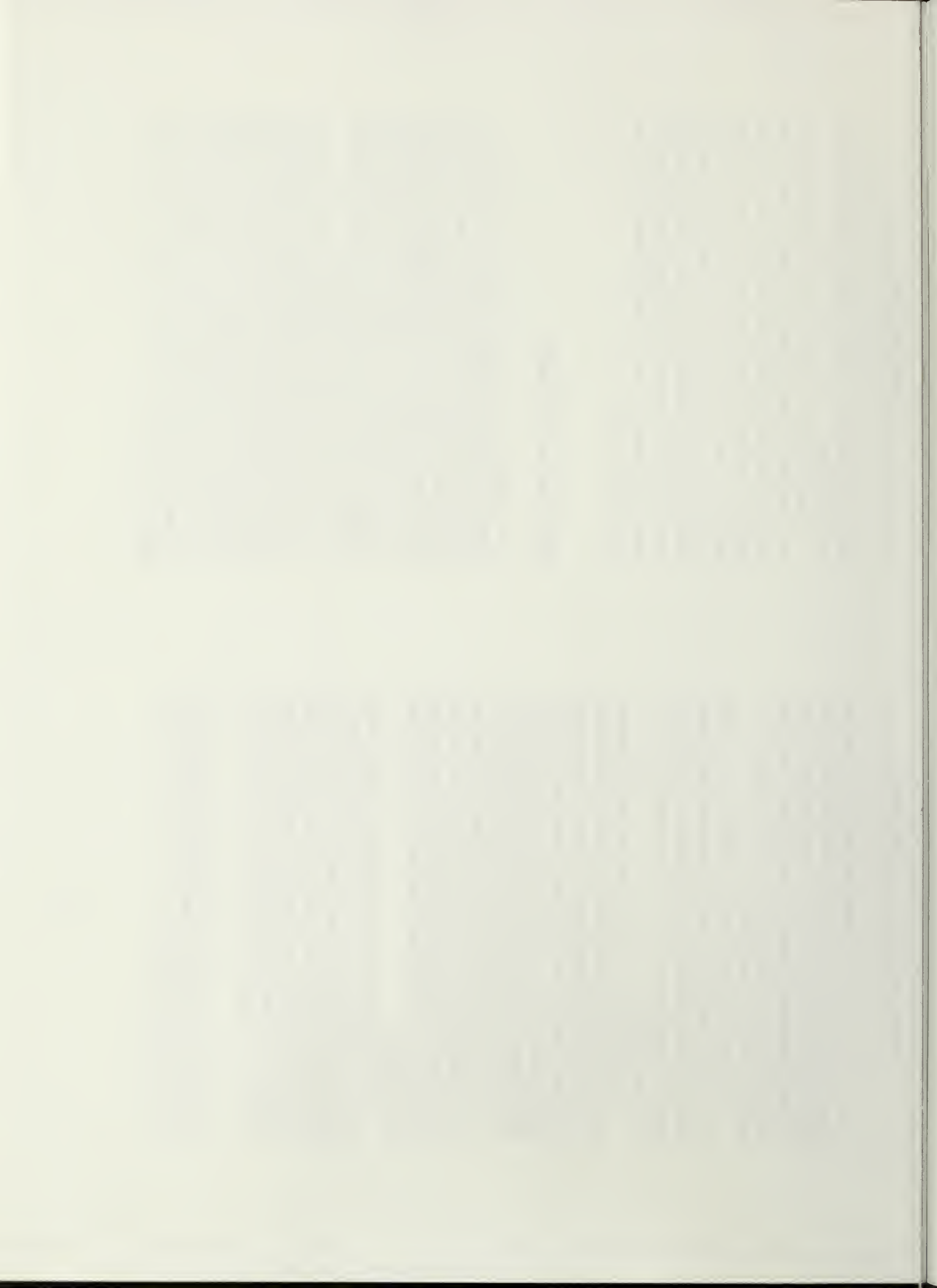
have "psyched out the teacher" and know how to play the teacher's game.

Kids know you care when you find out who they are, encourage them to see mistakes as opportunities to learn and grow, and have faith in their ability to make a meaningful contribution. They know you care when they feel listened to and their thoughts and feelings are taken seriously. All these things happen during class meetings, with a minimum investment in patience and time for skill building. An atmosphere of caring begins with the teacher, who guides students to treat one another in ways that demonstrate caring.

The Power of Caring

Carter Bayton, a teacher in an inner-city New York school, expressed the idea of caring in these moving words: "You have to touch the heart before you can reach the mind." In September 1991, *Life* magazine featured a story about Bayton and seventeen second-graders who had been labeled "unteachable" in a regular classroom. He taught them so well that in six months they challenged the "regular class" (which they had been deemed unfit to enter) to a math contest—and won!

Carter Bayton understands the importance of treating students with kindness and firmness. He knows it's important to make sure the message of caring gets through. This is a truly essential part of a teacher-student relationship. We have many opportunities to convey our message of caring, and we must be sure to seize them. When students feel cared about, they want to cooperate, not misbehave. When they do not *need* to misbehave to gain attention and significance, they are free to learn. Class



meetings provide a format in which students can gain attention and feel significant and productive.

Barriers and Builders

Class meetings help create the kind of environment for empowering students to be respectful, resourceful, cooperative, and capable. It is worth the effort. Respect and encouragement are two basic ingredients of caring. We have identified five common behaviors (barriers) that adults use with young people that are disrespectful and discouraging, and five behaviors (builders) that are respectful and encouraging.²

Barrier 1: Assuming

We often assume we know what students think and feel without asking them. We also assume what they can or can't do and how they should or shouldn't respond. We then deal with them according to *our* assumptions, preventing us from discovering their unique capabilities.

Builder 1: Checking

Class meetings provide an opportunity for teachers to discover what students actually think and feel. When we check instead of assume, we discover how students are maturing in their ability to deal with problems and issues that affect them.

One special-education teacher, trained in behavior modification, assumed her students were not capable of

²See also H. Stephen Glenn and Jane Nelsen, *Raising Self-Reliant Children in a Self-Indulgent World* (Rocklin, CA: Prima Publishing, 1989), and *Empowering Others: Ten Keys to Affirming and Validating People*, a video with H. Stephen Glenn (Provo, UT: Sunrise Books, Tapes, and Videos, 1988).

participating in class meetings; she believed it was her job to control their behavior. She was encouraged to test her assumptions by trying a class meeting. Even though the children couldn't write their names, each had a special "mark" they could stamp on the agenda to signify they wanted help with a problem. The teacher discovered that the children were more capable than she assumed. They quickly learned to express their needs at the class meeting and engage in problem solving far beyond the teacher's assumptions.

Barrier 2: Rescuing/Explaining

We often think we are being caring or helpful when we do things *for* students rather than allow them to have their own experiences to learn from. Likewise, we may think we're being helpful by explaining things to students, instead of letting them discover the explanation for themselves.

Builder 2: Exploring

Class meetings enable teachers to help students learn to make choices as well as understand themselves, others, and situations through their own experiences.

Teachers explain and rescue when they say, "It's cold outside, so don't forget your jackets." Teachers explore when they say, "As you look outside, what do you need to think about before you go out to recess? What do you need to do to take care of yourselves?"

Barrier 3: Directing

We don't realize how disrespectful we are to students when we direct them. "Pick that up!" "Put that away!" "Straighten up your desk before the bell rings!" These are all directives that reinforce dependency, eliminate initiative and



cooperation, and encourage passive-aggressive behavior (grudgingly doing the minimum amount of work, leaving as much undone as possible in order to “bug” the teacher).

Builder 3: Inviting/Encouraging

Class meetings allow teachers to involve students in the planning and problem-solving activities that can help them become self-directed. (“The bell will ring soon. I would appreciate anything any of you could do to help me get the room straightened up for the next class.”) Students are motivated to cooperate when they participate in designing a solution to a problem or in organizing a project.

Barrier 4: Expecting

It is important that teachers have high expectations for young people and believe in their potential. However, when that potential becomes the standard and we judge them for falling short, we discourage them. (“I was expecting more maturity from you. I thought you were more responsible than that. I expected you to be the kind of student your brother was.”)

Builder 4: Celebrating

Class meetings let teachers and students acknowledge each other through compliments. When we are quick to celebrate any movement in the direction of a student’s potential or maturity, we encourage. When we demand too much too soon, we discourage.

A student who has never risked asking a question and suddenly asks a question unrelated to the topic being discussed, could be affirmed for asking the question instead of criticized for not paying attention. Students who

cheat can be affirmed for their desire to pass, and then invited to explore other ways to accomplish their goal.

Barrier 5: “Ism-ing”

“Adultisms” occur when we forget that children are not mature adults and expect them to think and act like adults. The language of “ism-ing” is, “How come you never . . . ?” “Why can’t you ever . . . ?” “Surely you realize . . . ?” “How many times do I have to tell you?” “I can’t believe you would do such a thing!” “You are such a disappointment.” Almost anything that begins with *should* or *ought* is usually an “adultism.” They produce guilt and shame rather than support and encouragement. The message of an “ism” is, “Since you don’t see what I see, you are at fault.”

Builder 5: Respecting

Class meetings encourage interaction between teachers and students that help both understand differences in how people perceive things. This understanding creates a climate of acceptance that encourages growth and effective communication. Instead of judging people for what they don’t see, we encourage them to seek understanding of themselves and others.

Instead of saying, “You knew what I wanted on this project!” a teacher could say, “What is your understanding of the requirements for this project?” or, “What were you thinking of when you presented your project this way?”

The five barriers discourage students from growing and developing into capable young people. Teachers who use the barriers usually have good intentions, believing students will be motivated by assumptions, by being rescued and directed, by expectations, and by “isms.” But the barriers create frustration and discouragement for teachers

and students alike. Switching to the five builders empowers both teachers and students. As teachers think of students as people, it is easier to empower them by checking, exploring, inviting and encouraging, celebrating, and respecting. A teacher tells the following story:

When I first heard about the barriers and builders, I realized that I was using barriers with my students. I assumed they needed me to step in and take care of things, explain things, direct them where to go and what to do, point out where they fell short of my expectations for the day by "shoulding" on them. Then I ended up lecturing, using expressions like "How many times must I tell you?" or "You know better than that!" I felt exhausted, and the students weren't progressing.

I switched to builders. I checked the students' understanding of a problem, explored their perceptions of how to work with it, invited their assistance in finding a solution, celebrated any movement in the desired direction rather than pointing out where they fell short of my expectations, and showed respect for them by honoring their thoughts and feelings. The classroom atmosphere improved. So did my disposition and the kids' progress.

We guarantee 100% improvement in student-teacher relationships when teachers simply learn to recognize barrier behaviors and stop demonstrating them. Where else can you get such a generous return for ceasing a behavior? And when the builders are added, the payoff is even greater.

A high school principal told us that the chapter in *Raising Self-Reliant Children in a Self-Indulgent World* on barriers and builders totally changed his relationship with his twenty-two-year-old daughter, who was away at college. The next time he had a telephone conversation with her, he listened. Every time he felt tempted to use his usual barriers of expecting, assuming, lecturing, rescuing, or

directing, he kept his mouth shut. His daughter opened up and told him more than she ever had before. At the end of the conversation, she said, "You sure are different, Dad." She called more often after that, and there was a warmer feeling between them. He concluded his story by saying, "You were right. I got 100% return in an improved relationship by doing nothing."

Caring Attitudes and Skills

In addition to the barriers and builders, there are attitude changes teachers can make and skills they can learn that will demonstrate to students that their teachers really care about them.

Awareness of Tone of Voice

Many teachers are completely unaware of their tone of voice and how it can affect students. In one junior high school class, for example, the students were in serious conflict with their teacher, who couldn't understand their hostility. A visitor to the classroom was shocked to watch the teacher's manner and listen to her tone of voice. Whenever students misbehaved, she yelled at them, criticized them, and humiliated them in front of their classmates. After class, the visitor asked the teacher if she would like some feedback. She said yes and was told, "You are trying to put out a small fire with a blowtorch." Having been completely unaware of her manner and tone, the teacher changed both by the next class period. That same day she told another faculty member, "My classes have been much smoother this afternoon since I decided to put away my blowtorch."



Listening and Taking Kids Seriously

A seventeen-year-old high school student decided not to turn in any of his homework, in order to punish his teacher for her "attitude problem." Whenever he tried to talk to her about homework, he thought she was insinuating that he was lazy and didn't take him seriously. He did well on the tests, and thought the teacher was picking on him *because* he didn't turn his work in.

With encouragement from his parents, he decided to talk to his teacher about his feelings. This time, she really listened. When he finished, she said, "I know it seems unfair that I insist on homework regardless of how well you do on a test. I'm sorry this upsets you, but I'm unwilling to change the rule. I thought you didn't care about school, and I apologize for treating you disrespectfully. I'm glad you took the time to tell me how you feel." Although the conversation didn't change the homework situation, the young man felt understood and accepted, and he stopped acting out in the classroom.

Enjoying the Job

Robert Rasmussen, called Ras by his students, was voted High School Teacher of the Year five years in a row by juniors and seniors. The school district also honored him as Teacher of the Year.

While Ras was out of the room, we asked the students why they thought Ras received these honors. Their answers could be divided into three categories: He respects us, he listens to us, and he enjoys his job. "What does enjoying the job have to do with anything?" we asked. One of the students explained, "Many teachers come to work with an attitude problem. They hate us. They hate their jobs. They seem to hate life. They take it out on us. Ras is always up. He seems to enjoy us, his job, and life in general."

Ras has a unique way of making sure the message of caring gets through. He has a teddy bear in his classroom. He introduces the bear to his students and says, "This is our care bear. If any of you feels discouraged or a little down, come get the bear. He'll make you feel better." At first the students think he's bonkers. After all, they are high school juniors and seniors, young adults. But it doesn't take long for them to catch the spirit. Every day, several students, including the big football players, go to Ras's desk and say, "Give me the bear."

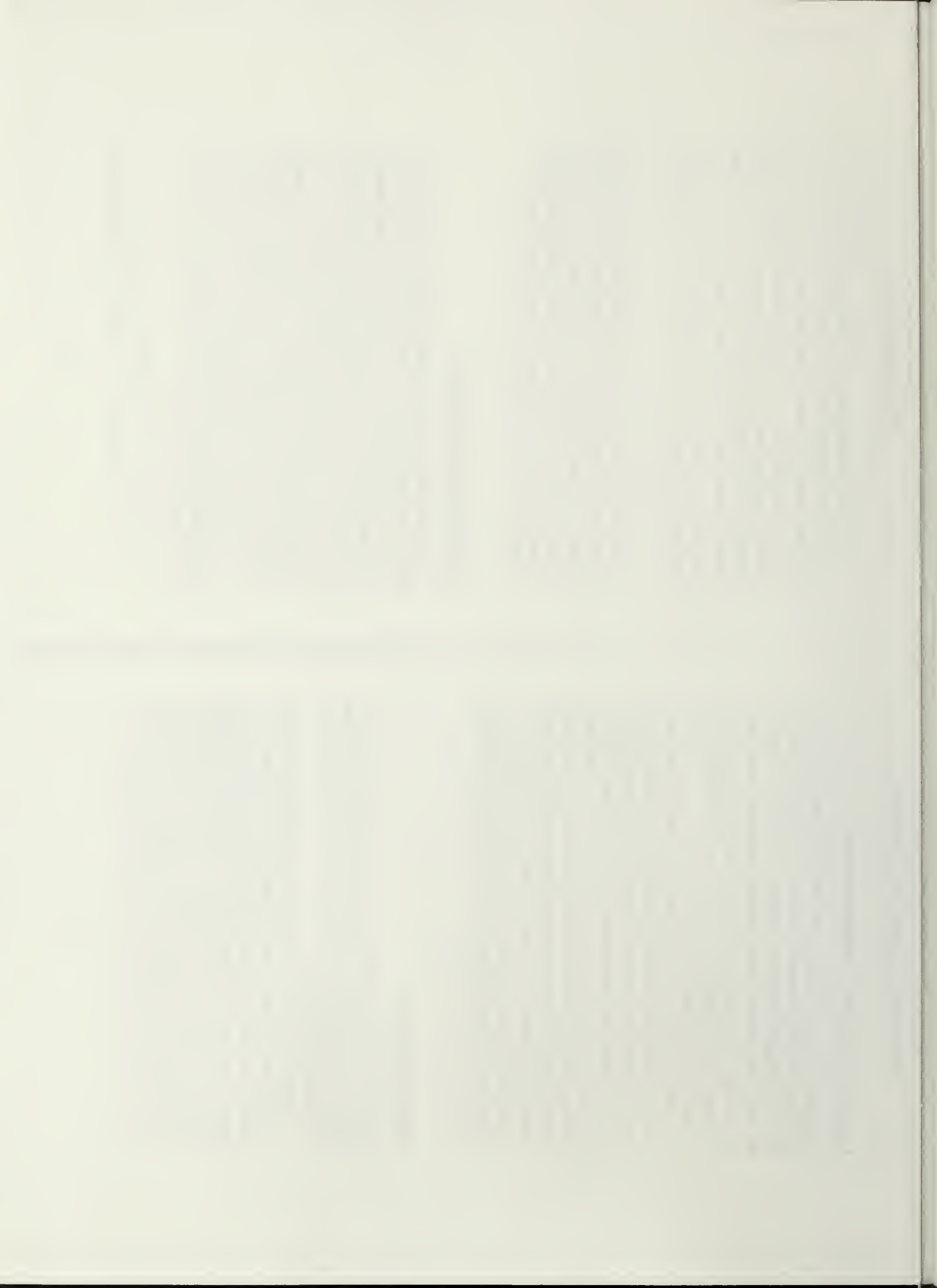
The bear concept became so popular that Ras had to provide more bears to keep up with the demand. Sometimes the kids carry them around all day, but they always bring them back. Sometimes, when Ras sees a student who looks a little down, he tosses a bear to the student. This is his symbolic way of saying, "I care. I don't have time to spend with you personally right now, but I care."

Appreciating Uniqueness

A student thinks a teacher cares when his or her uniqueness is recognized. One teacher made a set of baseball cards for his third-grade class, with each card having a student's picture and nickname. The nicknames expressed the unique interest of each child. For example, one card said "Cat-Lover Colleen" and another, "Home-Run Sean." Although it takes time and skill to make a set of baseball cards, it can be fun to let the kids come up with nicknames together, as long as the activity remains respectful.

Another way of expressing each students' uniqueness is to have them create their own T-shirts. Give each student a piece of paper cut out in the form of a T-shirt, with the following instructions:

1. Write your name at the top of the shirt.
2. In the middle, write one word that describes you.



3. Write words that describe some of your characteristics and special interests all over the shirt.
4. Across the bottom, write one thing about you that most people probably don't know.
5. Tape the T-shirt on your clothes with masking tape, and walk around the room. Talk to at least three other people using the information on your T-shirt as the basis of conversation.

Developing an Appropriate Attitude

Think about how you feel when you're watching babies and toddlers; it seems like everything they do is adorable. See if you can get to the point with your students where you can truly say, "Aren't they cute!"

When we are able to see behavior as age-appropriate, it helps us see otherwise annoying behavior as cute. A third-grade boy in torn, dirty pants will begin to look adorable, a seventh-grader acting like a "big shot" will bring a smile, and a teacher might even look forward to hearing the latest installment from a high school student who "knows much more than you."

Having a Sense of Humor

Sometimes teachers forget to see the humor in situations with students. It's okay not to be serious all the time. Mrs. Turner plays a game with her class called Let's Make a Deal, and the kids love it. She says, "Okay, kids, it's time for Let's Make a Deal. I like to start on time, and you like to leave on time. I'll save up the time I have to wait to get started, and you can make it up after school. Deal?" The kids groan and then settle down.

Mr. Barkley has a droll sense of humor that kids love. They know he cares about them and whether or not they

succeed in school. Some teachers use sarcasm in the guise of humor to put students down, and others may "go for a laugh" at a student's expense. With Mr. Barkley, the students sense the feeling behind what he does, and his caring comes through. If there is sincere caring for the kids, they will get the message.

One day, Mr. Barkley was dealing with a daydreaming student. He put his hand lightly on the boy's shoulder and said, "Picture this. You're eighteen years old. You get up and turn on MTV. You know everyone on the videos and all the words to the songs. But will anyone give you a job? No way! And why not? Because you spent all your time in my class staring into space." The student looked up, grinned, and opened his book.

Later in the period, a student, Jennifer, was passing notes to a friend and paying no attention to a play Mr. Barkley was reading to the class. In a smooth but slightly louder voice, Mr. Barkley read, "To be or not to be, that is the question Jennifer asks herself each day." She looked up and said, "Huh? Were you calling on me?" Mr. Barkley said, "Did anyone hear me call on Jennifer? I don't think so." Jennifer paid attention to the rest of class.

Respecting Students' Outside Interests

It's easy to forget that students have other interests in life besides school. Their social life is extremely important to them, and often they are dealing with rejection or popularity. They may be dealing with the trauma of not being chosen for teams, or never being the first or the best. By the time they reach junior high and high school, they may have (among others) job issues, car issues, dating issues, sex issues, and drug issues.

Many kids operate according to a different clock than adults do. They like to stay up late and then have difficulty getting up in the morning. Yet they have to conform

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to an early start at school. We saw this note pasted on a door of a high school classroom in Charlotte, North Carolina:

Tardies, please come into the room quietly, find a seat, look for your directions on the board. I earning begins as soon as the tardy bell rings.

Instead of humiliating or punishing latecomers, this teacher respectfully allows students to experience the consequences and take care of what they need to do to catch up. Students can come in and start working right away instead of going to the office, getting papers, feeling like they're in trouble, and disturbing the class.

Another teacher tells his students, "I won't take roll until five minutes after the tardy bell. I know some of you have jobs and have a difficult time handling all the demands of teenagers. It would be better if you could sleep in until 10:00, go to school until 5:00, and have the rest of the evening for family time, jobs, and a social life." The kids cheer. They do their best not to take advantage. They respect this teacher because *they* feel respected. He knows how to make sure the message of caring get through.

Involving Students

Many teachers are used to directing students and trying to solve student problems themselves. Then they wonder why students resist. We have been in many classrooms where the teacher's neatly printed "Classroom Rules" are posted on the wall. With this method, students become *passive recipients* of a teacher's demands—what an invitation for them to either give in or rebel.

Some teachers have found a way to invite cooperation. They wait until the first day of school and ask the kids to be involved in brainstorming classroom rules. Their list of ideas is quickly scribbled on paper, labeled "Our

Rules," and posted on the wall. This is an invitation for kids to cooperate, because they have participated in the decisions. What is surprising is that the rules are the same as, or stricter than, the rules teachers try to force on students.

Students feel a teacher's caring when they are consulted and involved. They rise to the occasion when a teacher says, "This is our learning environment, and together we are responsible for making it work." Teachers who fear a loss of control if they allow that kind of student input will be delighted to find that control is not needed. Cooperation and collaboration, based on mutual respect, replace control.

Improvement, Not Perfection

Students know a teacher cares when the teacher encourages improvement instead of insisting on perfection. The class-meeting process provides an excellent opportunity for students to trust this philosophy. Class meetings may never be perfect, but every failure can provide an opportunity for solutions. The teacher should continue asking, "What can we do to solve this problem?" Not only does this question show teachers care, it encourages kids to care about each other.

Caring in Class Meetings

The power of caring through class meetings is demonstrated in the following examples. Frank Meder, a teacher in the Sacramento City School District, started class meetings in a school where violence in the elementary school was so bad that the janitor periodically had to clean up blood. Vandalism was so prevalent that the sheriff was called on a weekly basis. Frank said that he got a stomach



ache every Sunday afternoon around 1:00 because he dreaded returning to the classroom Monday morning. When Frank decided to try class meetings, he felt more desperate than hopeful. He doubted that his disruptive students could learn cooperation and problem-solving skills; he was delighted to be proven wrong. The year Frank started class meetings, it came to the attention of his principal that although there were sixty-one suspensions for fights, not one student was from Frank's class. She also noticed that Frank's students came to school more regularly and were improving academically. When the principal sat in on one of Frank's class meetings, she realized what a great preventive tool the meeting was and asked Frank to show all the teachers in the school how to conduct class meetings.

The following year, every teacher, first through sixth grade, had class meetings at least four times a week. The following statistics were reported by Ann Platt in her master's thesis at California State University, Sacramento: only four suspensions for fighting as opposed to sixty-one the year before; only two cases of reported vandalism, as opposed to twenty-four the year before.³

In another instance, a school with a serious graffiti problem kept hiring painters to repaint the walls. Every time a wall was repainted, the kids put graffiti on it again. One of the teachers suggested asking the student body for ideas on how to solve the problem. The students decreed that when kids were caught writing on the wall, they would be supervised by another student monitor while they repainted. It's no surprise that the graffiti problem disappeared.

³Ann Roeder Platt, "Efficacy of Class Meetings in Elementary Schools," project submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science in Counseling, California State University, 1979.

Another example of the power of caring through a class meeting is provided by Earl Lesk.⁴ Mr. Lesk, a high school teacher, decided to initiate regular class meetings in his Biology 11 and 12 classes. He asked his students if they would like to participate, and they said yes. One eleventh-grade student, who'd had difficulty in all aspects of the course, but finished the semester successfully, summed up the class feelings: "By using encouragement and not forcing people to do things, the class became more independent and cooperative, which allowed us to use our own initiative to put forth a good effort."

These teachers and schools have incorporated class meetings with excellent results. They are just a few of the many who have experienced tremendous success by starting class meetings. If a teacher is willing to learn a process that teaches students many valuable skills, it can also make the job easier and more fun. Helping students experience caring, belonging, and significance is the most powerful thing a teacher can do, motivating them to fulfill their highest potential—academically and otherwise.

Effective class meetings help students become more self-confident. They help improve self-esteem by increasing a sense of belonging and self-acceptance. As students contribute to the meeting, they find that they have the ability to make a difference and feel a sense of ownership through participation. They soon understand that teachers care about them and their concerns, and that their contributions are valued.

⁴Earl Lesk, "Freedom with Responsibility," *The B. C. Teacher*, January/February 1982.

The Return of Character Education

Thomas Lickona

Concern over the moral condition of American society is prompting a reevaluation of the school's role in teaching values.

To educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society.

—Theodore Roosevelt

Increasing numbers of people across the ideological spectrum believe that our society is in deep moral trouble. The disheartening signs are everywhere: the breakdown of the family; the deterioration of civility in everyday life; rampant greed at a time when one in five children is poor; an omnipresent sexual culture that fills our television and movie screens with sleaze, beckoning the young

toward sexual activity at ever earlier ages; the enormous betrayal of children through sexual abuse; and the 1992 report of the National Research Council that says the United States is now *the* most violent of all industrialized nations.

As we become more aware of this societal crisis, the feeling grows that schools cannot be ethical bystanders. As a result, character education is making a comeback in American schools.

Early Character Education

Character education is as old as education itself. Down through history, education has had two great goals: to help people become smart and to help them become good.

Acting on that belief, schools in the earliest days of our republic tackled character education head on—through discipline, the teacher's example, and the daily school curriculum. The Bible was the public school's sourcebook for both moral and religious instruction. When struggles eventually arose over whose Bible to use and which doctrines to teach, William McGuffey stepped onto the stage in 1836 to offer his McGuffey Readers, ultimately to sell more than 100 million copies.

McGuffey retained many favorite Biblical stories but added poems, exhortations, and heroic tales. While children practiced their reading or arithmetic, they also learned lessons about honesty, love of neighbor, kindness to animals, hard work, thriftiness, patriotism, and courage.

Why Character Education Declined

In the 20th century, the consensus supporting character education began to crumble under the blows of several powerful forces.

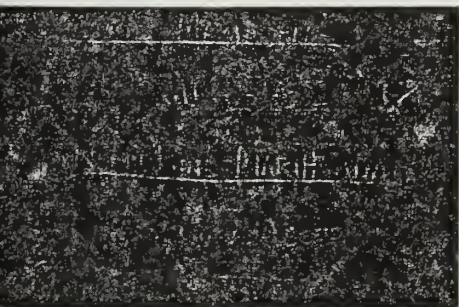
Darwinism introduced a new metaphor—evolution—that led people to see all things, including morality, as being in flux.

The philosophy of logical positivism, arriving at American universities from Europe, asserted a radical distinction between *facts* (which could be scientifically proven) and *values* (which positivism held were mere expressions of feeling, not objective truth). As a result of positivism, morality was relativized and privatized—made to seem a matter of personal “value judgment,” not a subject for public debate and transmission through the schools.

In the 1960s, a worldwide rise in personalism celebrated the worth, autonomy, and subjectivity of the person, emphasizing individual rights and freedom over responsibility. Personalism rightly protested societal oppression and injustice, but it also delegitimized moral authority, eroded belief in objective moral norms, turned people inward toward self-fulfillment, weakened social commitments (for example, to marriage and parenting), and fueled the socially destabilizing sexual revolution.

Finally, the rapidly intensifying pluralism of American society (Whose values should we teach?) and the increasing secularization of the public arena (Won't moral education violate the separation of church and state?), became two more barriers to achieving the moral consensus indispensable for character education in the public schools. Public schools retreated from their once central role as moral and character educators.

The 1970s saw a return of values education, but in new forms: values clarification and Kohlberg's moral dilemma discussions. In different ways, both expressed the individualist spirit of



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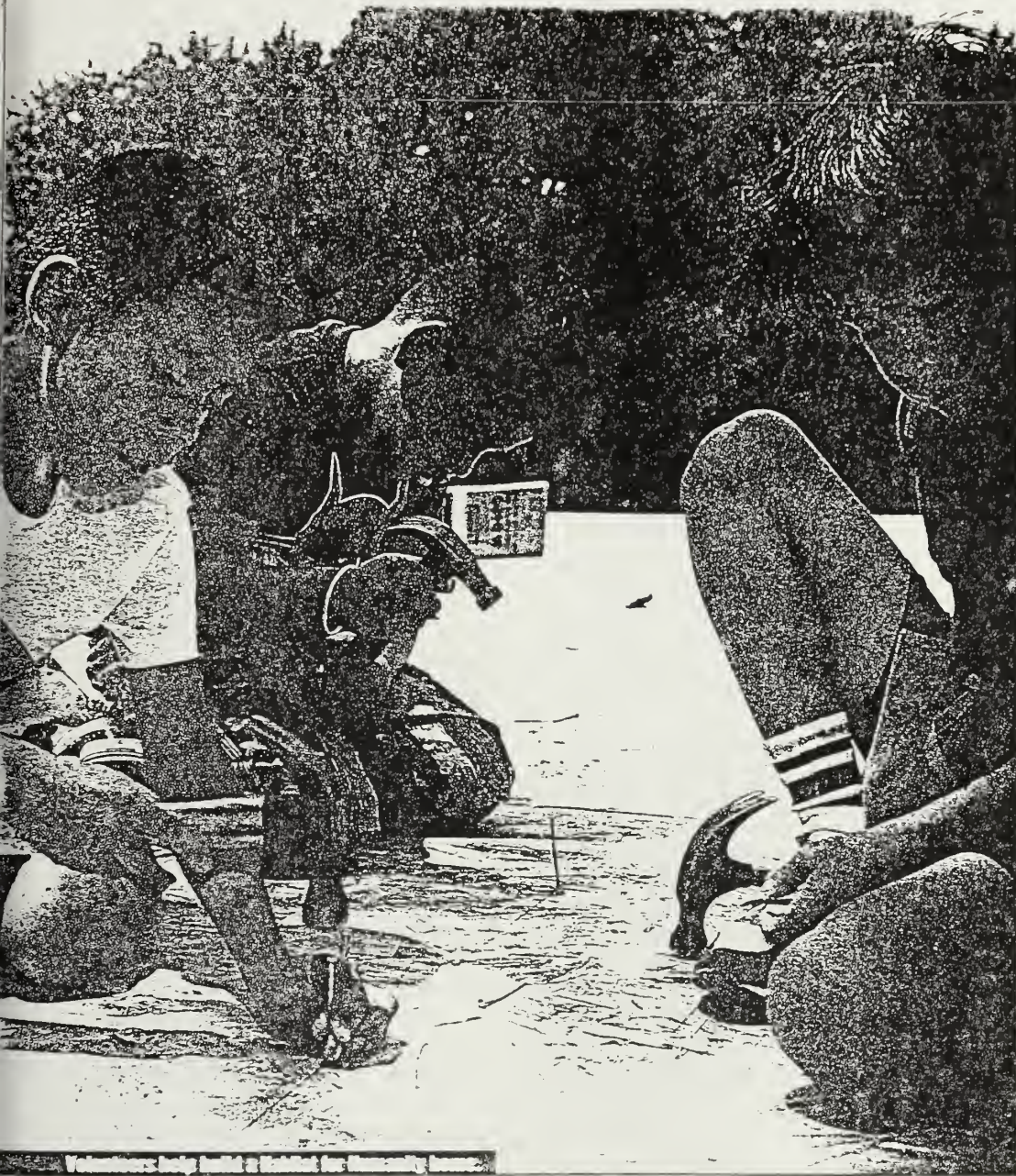
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Volunteers help build a Habitat for Humanity house.

Down through history, education has had two great goals: to help people become smart and to help them become good.

the 1990s, we are seeing the beginning of a new character education movement, one which restores "good character" to its rightful place as the central desideratum of the school's moral

enterprise. No longer is it a narrow, deep tradition, but a broad, shallow one. Studies to tell us what we are doing are not asking what kind of character education is afoot.

Each child has a different moral compass, but each has principles. Virtues are not taught in the classroom, but they are taught in the home. (Kohlberg, 1981, p. 10)

Education is not a matter of free choice, and moral education is not a matter of obligation. Kohlberg focused on moral reasoning, which is necessary but not sufficient for good character, and underestimated the school's role as a moral socializer.

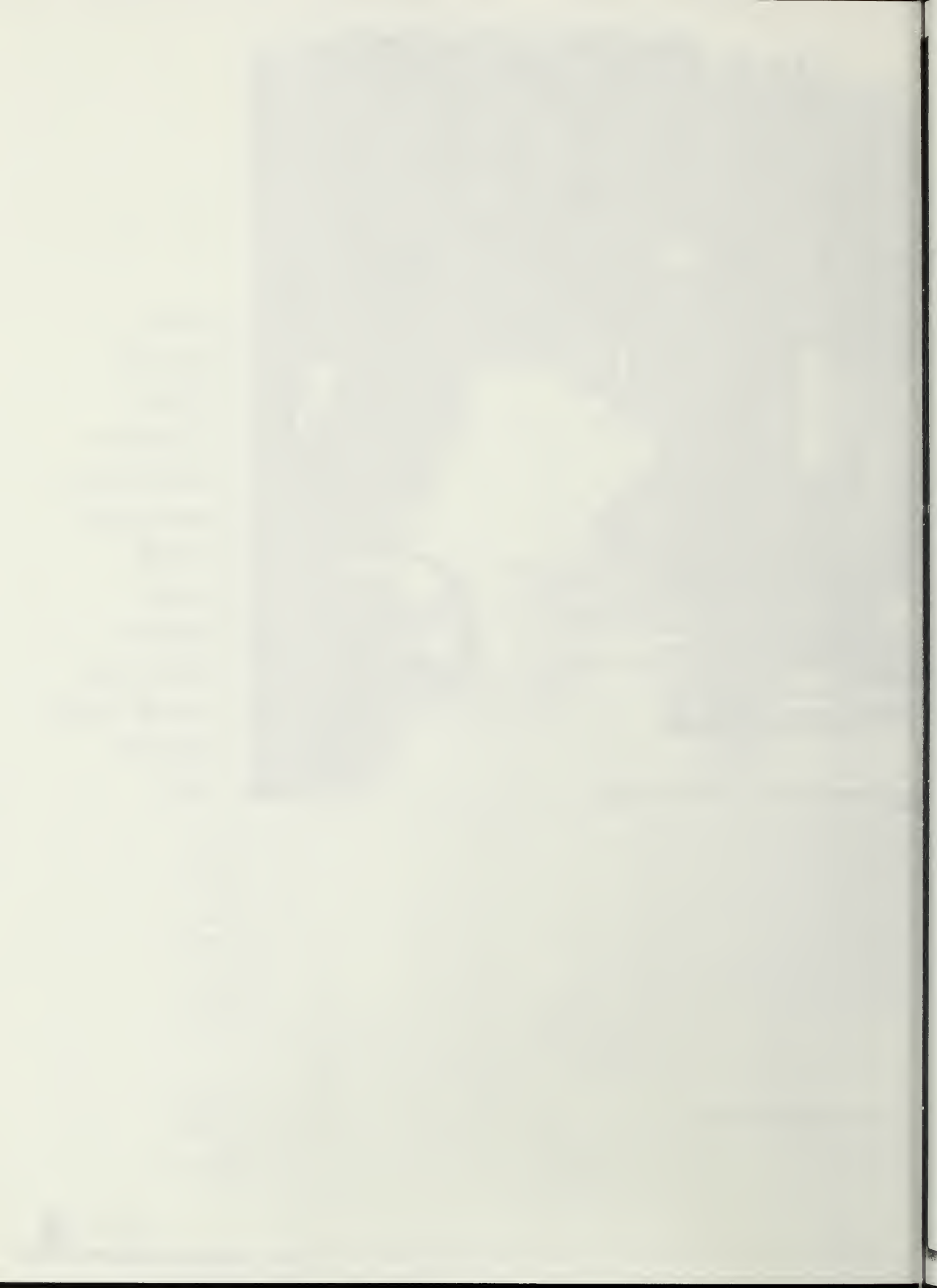
The New Character Education

In the 1990s we are seeing the beginning of a new character education movement, one which restores "good character" to its rightful place as the central desideratum of the school's moral

enterprise. No longer is it a narrow, deep tradition, but a broad, shallow one. Studies to tell us what we are doing are not asking what kind of character education is afoot.

In 1992, the National Institute of Ethics called together a group of educational leaders representing state societies, teachers' unions, universities, business and labor organizations, and religious groups. This diverse assemblage drafted the Aspen Declaration on Character Education, setting forth eight principles of character education.

The Character Education Partnership was launched in March 1993, a national coalition committed to putting character development at the top of the nation's education agenda. Members include representatives from business, labor, government, youth groups, faith communities, and the media. See the chart



The last two years have seen the publication of a spate of books—such as *Moral, Character, and Civic Education in the Elementary School*, *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right From Wrong*, and *Reclaiming Our Schools: A Handbook on Teaching Character, Academics, and Discipline*—that make the case for character education and describe promising programs around the country. A new periodical, the *Journal of Character Education*, is devoted entirely to covering the field.²

Why Character Education Now?

Why this groundswell of interest in character education? There are at least three causes:

1. *The decline of the family.* The family, traditionally a child's primary moral teacher, is for vast numbers of children today failing to perform that role, thus creating a moral vacuum. In her recent book *When the Bough Breaks: The Cost of Neglecting Our Children*, economist Sylvia Hewlett documents that American children, rich and poor, suffer a level of neglect unique among developed nations (1991). Overall, child well-being has declined despite a decrease in the number of children per family, an increase in the educational level of parents, and historically high levels of public spending in education.

In "Dan Quayle Was Right." (April 1993) Barbara Dafoe Whitehead synthesizes the social science research on the decline of the two biological-parent family in America:

If current trends continue, less than half of children born today will live continuously with their own mother and father throughout childhood.... An increasing number of children will experience family break-up two or even three times during childhood.

Children of marriages that end in divorce and children of single mothers

The Character Education Partnership

Many ASCD members are demonstrating an interest in character development through participation in the new Character Education Partnership, Inc. A nonprofit, nonpartisan organization incorporated in February 1993, the Partnership is a broad coalition of educators, business people, faith community leaders, and others who seek to develop civic virtue and moral character in our youth.

The Partnership, the result of a meeting funded by The Johnson Foundation and sponsored by ASCD with Princeton Project 55, brought together key national education organizations to recommit themselves to character education. The Partnership believes that character education is an essential element of successful school reform because it helps reduce negative student behavior, improve academic performance, and prepare young people to be responsible citizens.

The Partnership is beginning to provide services that include a clearinghouse on character education materials, an annual conference, and materials and expertise on how to develop a consensus on core values at the community level.

ASCD is a charter member of the Partnership, holds a seat on its Board of Directors and Executive Committee, and is currently leasing the Partnership office space as part of ASCD's efforts to collaborate with other organizations toward mutual goals.

ASCD's own interest in character education dates back to an emphasis on values in the 1950s. In the late 1980s, ASCD began publishing books and articles on character education, including *How to Plan a Program for Moral Education*, by Merrill Harmin, and the May 1993 *Update* focused on character education programs. The 1993 ASCD Annual Conference included a strand on moral issues, and the 1994 conference will have a strand on values and beliefs. ASCD has also supported moral education through its resolutions.

For more information, contact John Martin, Executive Director, The Character Education Partnership, at (703) 549-9110; or Diane Berreth, Deputy Executive Director, ASCD, at (703) 549-9110, ext. 305, 1250 N. Pitt St., Alexandria, VA 22314-1453. ■

—Diane Berreth

are more likely to be poor, have emotional and behavioral problems, fail to achieve academically, get pregnant, abuse drugs and alcohol, get in trouble with the law, and be sexually and physically abused. Children in stepfamilies are generally worse off (more likely to be sexually abused, for example) than children in single-parent homes.

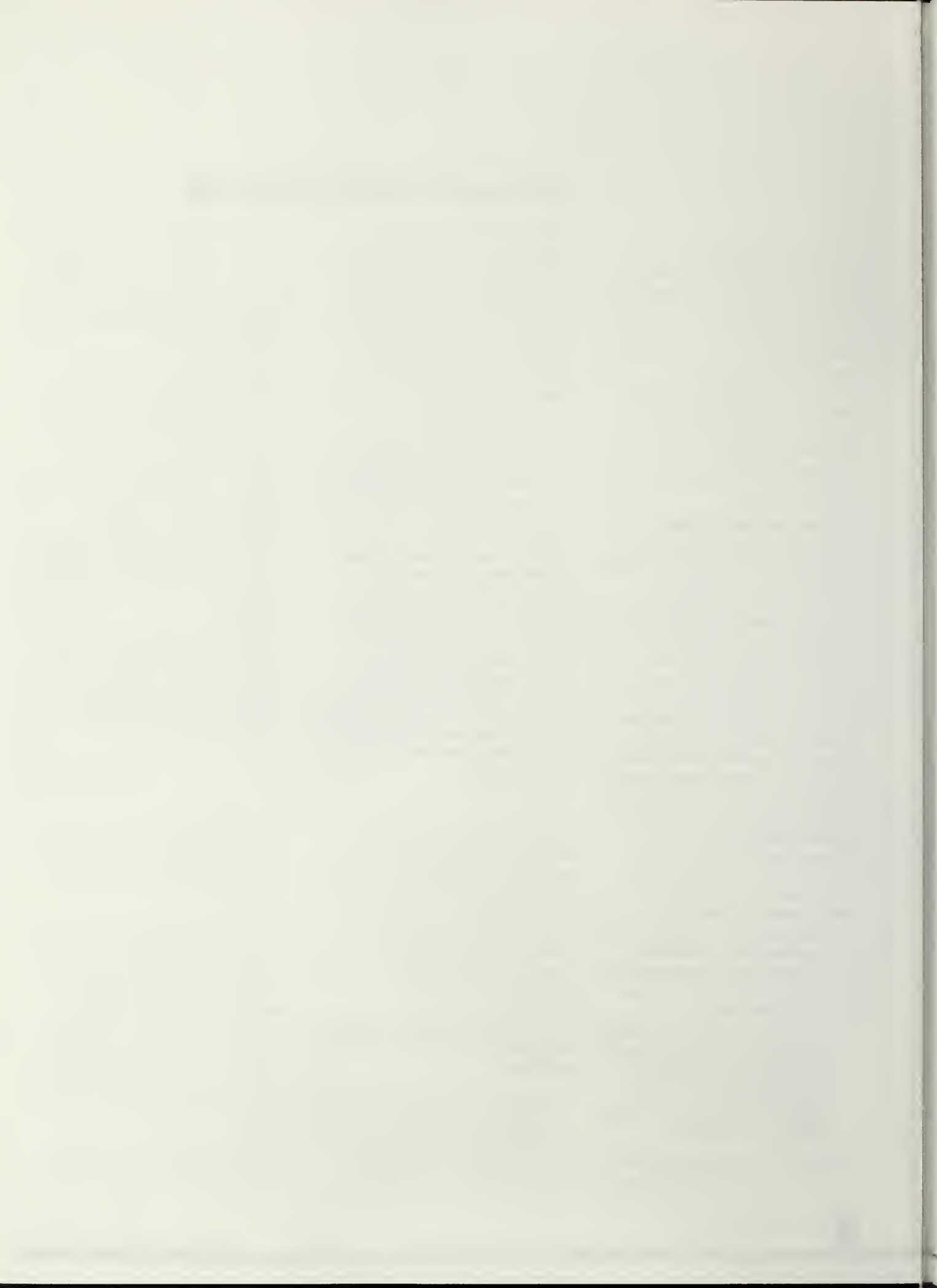
No one has felt the impact of family disruption more than schools. Whitehead writes:

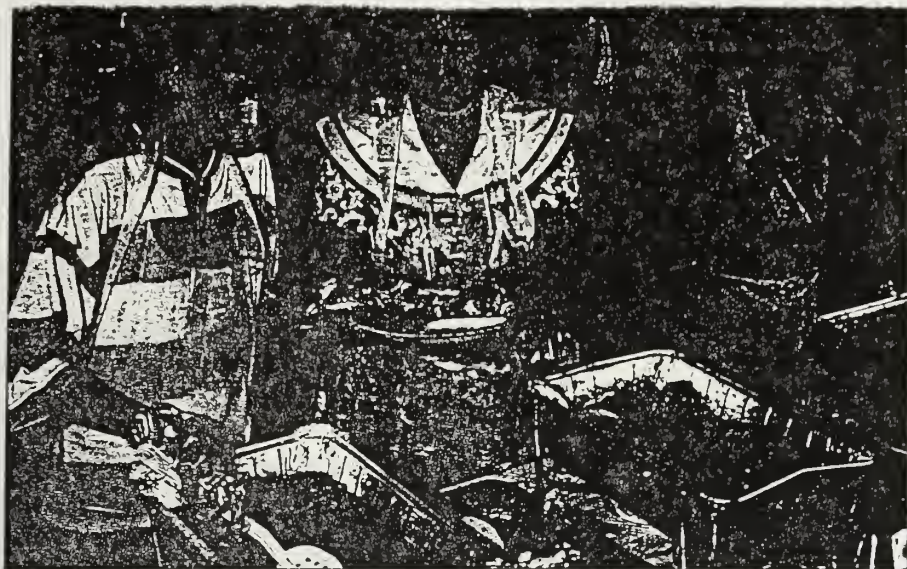
Across the nation, principals report a dramatic rise in the aggressive, acting-out behavior characteristic of children, especially boys, who are living in single-parent families. Moreover, teachers find that many children are so

upset and preoccupied by the explosive drama of their own family lives that they are unable to concentrate on such mundane matters as multiplication tables.

Family disintegration, then, drives the character education movement in two ways: schools have to teach the values kids aren't learning at home; and schools, in order to conduct teaching and learning, must become caring moral communities that help children from unhappy homes focus on their work, control their anger, feel cared about, and become responsible students.

2. *Troubling trends in youth character.* A second impetus for renewed character education is the sense that





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young people in general, not just those from fractured families, have been adversely affected by poor parenting (in intact as well as broken families); the wrong kind of adult role models; the sex, violence, and materialism portrayed in the mass media; and the pressures of the peer group. Evidence that this hostile moral environment is taking a toll on youth character can be found in 10 troubling trends: rising youth violence; increasing dishonesty (lying, cheating, and stealing); growing disrespect for authority; peer cruelty; a resurgence of bigotry on school campuses, from preschool through higher education; a decline in the work ethic; sexual precocity; a growing self-centeredness and declining civic responsibility; an increase in self-destructive behavior; and ethical illiteracy.

The statistics supporting these trends are overwhelming. For example, the U.S. homicide rate for 15- to 24-year-old males is 7 times higher than Canada's and 41 times higher than Japan's. The U.S. has one of the highest teenage pregnancy rates, the highest teen abortion rate, and the highest level of drug use among young people in the developed world. Youth suicide has tripled in the past 25 years, and a survey of more than 2,000 Rhode Island students, grades six through nine, found that two out of three boys and one of two girls thought it "acceptable for a man to force sex on a woman" if they had been dating for six months or more (Kikuchi 1988).

3. *A recovery of shared, objectively important ethical values.* Moral decline in society has gotten bad enough to jolt us out of the privatism and relativism dominant in recent decades. We are recovering the wisdom that we do share a basic morality, essential for our survival; that adults must promote this morality by teaching the young, directly and indirectly, such values as respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, fairness, caring, and civic virtue; and that these values are not merely subjective preferences but that they have objective worth and a claim on our collective conscience.

Such values affirm our human dignity, promote the good of the individual and the common good, and protect our human rights. They meet the classic ethical tests of reversibility (Would you want to be treated this way?) and universalizability (Would you want all persons to act this way in a similar situation?). They define our responsibilities in a democracy, and they are recognized by all civilized people and taught by all enlightened creeds. *Not* to teach children these core ethical values is a grave moral failure.

What Character Education Must Do

In the face of a deteriorating social fabric, what must character education do to develop good character in the young?

First, it must have an adequate theory of what good character is, one which gives schools a clear idea of

their goals. Character must be broadly conceived to encompass the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of morality. Good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good. Schools must help children *understand* the core values, *adopt* or commit to them, and then *act upon* them in their own lives.

The cognitive side of character includes at least six specific moral qualities: awareness of the moral dimensions of the situation at hand, knowing moral values and what they require of us in concrete cases, perspective-taking, moral reasoning, thoughtful decision-making, and moral self-knowledge. All these powers of rational moral thought are required for full moral maturity and citizenship in a democratic society.

People can be very smart about matters of right and wrong, however, and still choose the wrong. Moral education that is merely intellectual misses the crucial emotional side of character, which serves as the bridge between judgment and action. The emotional side includes at least the following qualities: conscience (the felt obligation to do what one judges to be right), self-respect, empathy, loving the good, self-control, and humility (a willingness to both recognize and correct our moral failings).

At times, we know what we should do, feel strongly that we should do it, yet still fail to translate moral judgment and feeling into effective moral behavior. Moral action, the third part of character, draws upon three additional moral qualities: competence (skills such as listening, communicating, and cooperating), will (which mobilizes our judgment and energy), and moral habit (a reliable inner disposition to respond to situations in a morally good way).

Mining the Values in the Curriculum

Kevin Ryan

Schools need to take a stronger role in helping the young to discover the good and learn to become individuals of character.

While the development of a child's character is clearly not the sole responsibility of the school, historically and legally schools have been major players in this arena. Young people spend much of their lives within school walls. There they will learn, either by chance or design, moral lessons about how people behave.

In helping students develop good character—the capacity to know the good, love the good, and do the good—schools should above all be contributing to a child's knowing what is good. But what is most worth knowing? And for what purpose? How do educators decide what to teach? Pressing concerns for ancient philosophers, these questions are even more demanding today as we struggle to make order out of our information-saturated lives. New dilemmas brought on by such developments as computers, doomsday weaponry, and lethal viruses challenge us daily.

What is a Good Person?

Before curriculum builders can answer "What's most worth knowing?" we have to know "For what?" To be well adjusted to the world around us? To become wealthy and self-sufficient? To be an artist? With a little reflection, most of us would come to similar conclusions as our great philosophers and spiritual leaders: education should help us become wise and good people.

What constitutes a "good person" has paralyzed many sincere educators and noneducators. Because the United States is a multiracial, multiethnic nation, many educators despair of coming up with a shared vision of the good person to guide curriculum builders. Our founders and early educational pioneers saw in the very diverse, multicultural American scene of the late 18th and early 19th centuries the clear need for a school system that would teach the civic virtues necessary to maintain our novel political and social experiment. They saw the school's role not only as contributing to a

person's understanding of what it is to be good, but also as teaching the enduring habits required of a democratic citizen.

Yet the school's curriculum must educate more than just the citizen. Conway Dorsett recently suggested that a good curriculum respects and balances the need "to educate the 'three people' in each individual: the worker, the citizen, and the private person" (1993). Our schools must provide opportunities for students to discover what is most worth knowing, as they prepare, not only to be citizens, but also good workers and good private individuals.

The work of C.S. Lewis may provide us with the multicultural model of a good person that we are seeking. Lewis discovered that certain ideas about how one becomes a good person recur in the writing of the ancient Egyptians, Babylonians, Hebrews, Chinese, Norse, Indians, and Greeks, and in Anglo-Saxon and American writings as well. Common values included kindness; honesty; loyalty to parents, spouses, and family members; an obligation to help the poor, the sick, and the less fortunate; and the right to private property. Some evils, such as treachery, torture, and murder, were considered worse than one's own death (1947).

Lewis called this universal path to becoming a good person by the Chinese name, "the Tao." Combining the wisdom of many cultures, this Tao could be our multicultural answer for how to live our lives, the basis for what is most worth knowing.

Over the years, teachers, curriculum specialists, and school officials have used the Tao, albeit unconsciously, to guide the work of schools. Translated into curriculum, the Tao guides schools to educate children to be concerned about the weak and those in need; to help others; to work hard and complete their tasks well and promptly, even when they do not want to; to control their tempers; to work cooperatively with others and practice good manners; to respect authority and other people's rights; to help resolve conflicts; to understand honesty, responsibility, and friendship; to balance pleasures with responsibilities; and to ask themselves and decide "What is the right thing to do?"



To engage students in the lessons in human character and ethics without resorting to preaching and didacticism is the great skill of teaching.

Most educators agree that our schools should teach these attitudes both in the formal and in the hidden curriculum.

The Formal Curriculum

The formal curriculum is usually thought of as the school's planned educational experiences—the selection and organization of knowledge and skills from the universe of possible choices. Of course, not all knowledge nor every skill contributes directly to knowing the good, but much of the subject matter of English and social studies is intimately connected to the Tao. Stories, historical figures, and events are included in the formal curriculum to illuminate the human condition. From them we can learn how to be a positive force in the lives of others, and we can also see the effects of a poorly lived life.

The men and women, real or fictitious, who we learn about in school are instruments for understanding what it is to be (or not to be) a good person. One of the strengths and attractions of good literature is its complexity. As students read, they learn about themselves and the world. For example, students come face-to-face with raw courage in the exploits of Harriet Tubman and further understand the danger of hate and racism through *The Diary of Anne Frank*. They glimpse in

Edward Arlington Robinson's poem "Miniver Cheevy" the folly of storing up earthly treasures. They see in Toni Cade Bambara's "Your Blues Ain't Like Mine" the intrinsic dignity of each human being. They gain insight into the heart of a truly noble man, Atticus Finch, in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. They perceive the thorny relationships between the leader and the led by following the well-intended, but failed efforts of Brutus in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*.

Our formal curriculum is a vehicle to teach the Tao, to help young people to come to know the good. But simply selecting the curriculum is not enough; like a vein of precious metal, the teacher and students must mine it together. To engage students in the lessons in human character and ethics contained in our history and literature without resorting to empty preaching and crude didacticism is the great skill of teaching.

The Hidden Curriculum

In addition to the formal curriculum, students learn from a hidden curriculum—all the personal and social instruction that they acquire from their day-to-day schooling. Much of what has been written about the hidden curriculum in recent decades has stressed that these school experiences often lead to students' loss of self-esteem, unswerving obedi-

ence to silly rules, and the suppression of their individuality. While true of some students and some schools, the hidden curriculum can lead either to negative or positive education.

Many of education's most profound and positive teachings can be conveyed in the hidden curriculum. If a spirit of fairness penetrates every corner of a school, children will learn to be fair. Through the service of teachers, administrators, and older students, students learn to be of service to others. By creating an atmosphere of high standards, the hidden curriculum can teach habits of accuracy and precision. Many aspects of school life, ranging from homework assignments to sporting events, can teach self-control and self-discipline.

While unseen, the hidden curriculum must be considered with the same seriousness as the written, formal curriculum. The everyday behavior of the faculty, staff, and other students cannot fail to have an impact on a student.

One school concerned with the hidden curriculum is Roxbury Latin, a fine academic high school in Boston. In the spring of 1992, an accrediting team interviewed 27 students, ranging

from 7th to 12th grade, asking them the same question, "What do you think is Roxbury Latin's philosophy of education?" Every one of the students came back with the same answer: "This school is most concerned about what kind of people we are becoming." What the review team did not know was that every September, the school's headmaster, Anthony Jarvis, assembles all the new students and delivers a short message:

We want you to excel in academics and sports and the arts while you are here. But, remember this: we care much more about your characters, what kind of people you are becoming.

End of message. End of assembly. All indications are that the message is getting through.

Policies and Practices

A school that makes a positive impact on the character of young people helps children to know the Tao and make it part of their lives. Such a school has in place the following policies and practices.

- The school has a mission statement widely known by students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the entire school community.

- The school has a comprehensive program of service activities, starting in the early grades and requiring more significant contributions of time and energy in the later years of high school.

- School life is characterized by a high level of school spirit and healthy intergroup competition.

- The school has an external charity or cause (a local home for the elderly or educational fund-raising for a Third World community) to which all members of the community contribute.

- The school has a grading and award system that does more than give lip service to character formation and ethics, but recognizes academic effort,

good discipline, contributions to the life of the classroom, service to the school and the community, respect for others, and good sportsmanship.

- The school expects not only teachers but also the older students to be exemplars of high ethical standards.

- The school's classrooms and public areas display mottoes and the pictures of exemplary historical figures.

- The school has regular ceremonies and rituals that bring the community together to celebrate achievements of excellence in all realms: academic, athletic, artistic and ethical.¹

Our students have a major task in life: to become individuals of character. Character education, then, is the central curriculum issue confronting educators. Rather than the latest fad, it is a school's oldest mission. Nothing is better for the human soul than to discuss excellence every day. The curriculum of our elementary and secondary schools should be the delivery system for this encounter with excellence. ■

¹Several of these policies and procedures are elaborated in *Reclaiming Our Schools: A Handbook for Teaching Character, Academics and Discipline*, by E. A. Wynne and K. Ryan, (Columbus, Ohio: Merrill, 1992).

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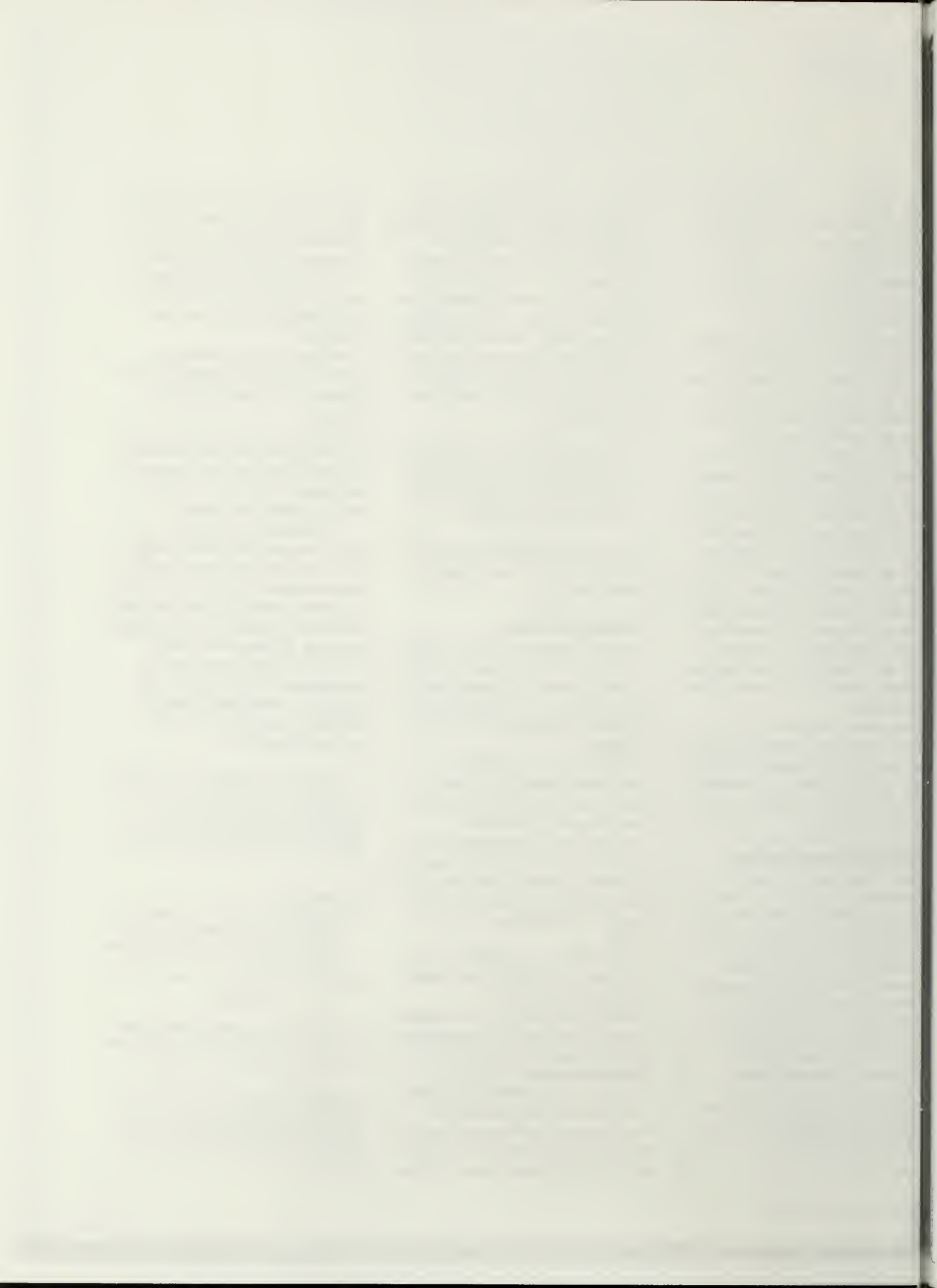
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Author's note: I wish to acknowledge Catherine Kinsella Stutz of Boston University for her contributions to this article.

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Character Education Network

One of the interactive networks sponsored by ASCD, the Character Education Network offers members opportunities to exchange research and instructional methods in ethical and moral education. Members communicate through a newsletter and receive bibliographies and a membership directory. For more information contact: Kevin Ryan, Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character, Boston University, School of Education, 605 Commonwealth Ave., Rm. 356, Boston, MA 02215. (617) 353-3262; (617) 353-3924 (fax). ■



Actions Speak Louder Than Words: What Students Think

Mary M. Williams

According to students, teachers “have to follow the rules themselves” in order to effectively teach character education.

What’s the most effective way to teach values? According to students, teachers “have to follow the values themselves.” They have to be “fair” and “real”—not “phony.” Teaching moral values doesn’t work, students say, if teachers try to “make it a big deal” or “have a separate class about it.”

These are some of the findings from a study I conducted to better understand how moral values and traits of character are taught and learned in classrooms. As a teacher, I was aware of the growing interest in character education across the nation, and I was concerned about the implementation of schoolwide character education programs.

First, I conducted a pilot study to determine how eight of the moral values stated by former Education Secretary William Bennett are learned by students in classrooms (Williams 1987).¹ Because “respect for others” had the highest priority for students, it became the focal value in my qualitative/ethnographic study.²

To discover how respect was taught to students and learned by them, I surveyed, observed, and interviewed teachers, students (grades 6-8), administrators, and parents in urban and suburban settings, in public and private schools, during one school year.³ I expected to find

that formal lessons about respect produce the best results. Yet, the findings indicate that respect is taught best through a hidden curriculum of modeling and quality teaching that creates a positive moral climate (Williams 1992).

Through the Eyes of Students

Analyzing the data from the perspective of students provides a vantage point that is rarely encountered in classroom research. Had this study been conducted from the teachers’ point of view, *all* of the participants would have been judged effective. They *all* asserted that it was part of their duty to teach moral values to students, and they *all* believed that they were successful in teaching character. According to middle school students, however, only some of their teachers (“model teachers”) follow through with this stated intention. The other teachers (“poor models”) are judged to be insincere and inconsistent.

Students from classrooms with “poor models” report evidence of double standards and differential treatment. For example, these teachers say things like, “You should be kind” and “Respect others.” Yet students report that they “choose favorites,” “treat us like babies,” “don’t listen,” and “give us busy work.” Although these poor models believe they are teaching respect, they are blind to the way their behaviors affect student learning and

behavior. As several students put it, “Teachers can’t fake it.”

When students perceive a teacher as insincere, they talk behind the teacher’s back, talk back to the teacher, and exhibit other behaviors generally deemed disrespectful. Students report that they “respect” these teachers only because they “have to.”

What “Model Teachers” Do

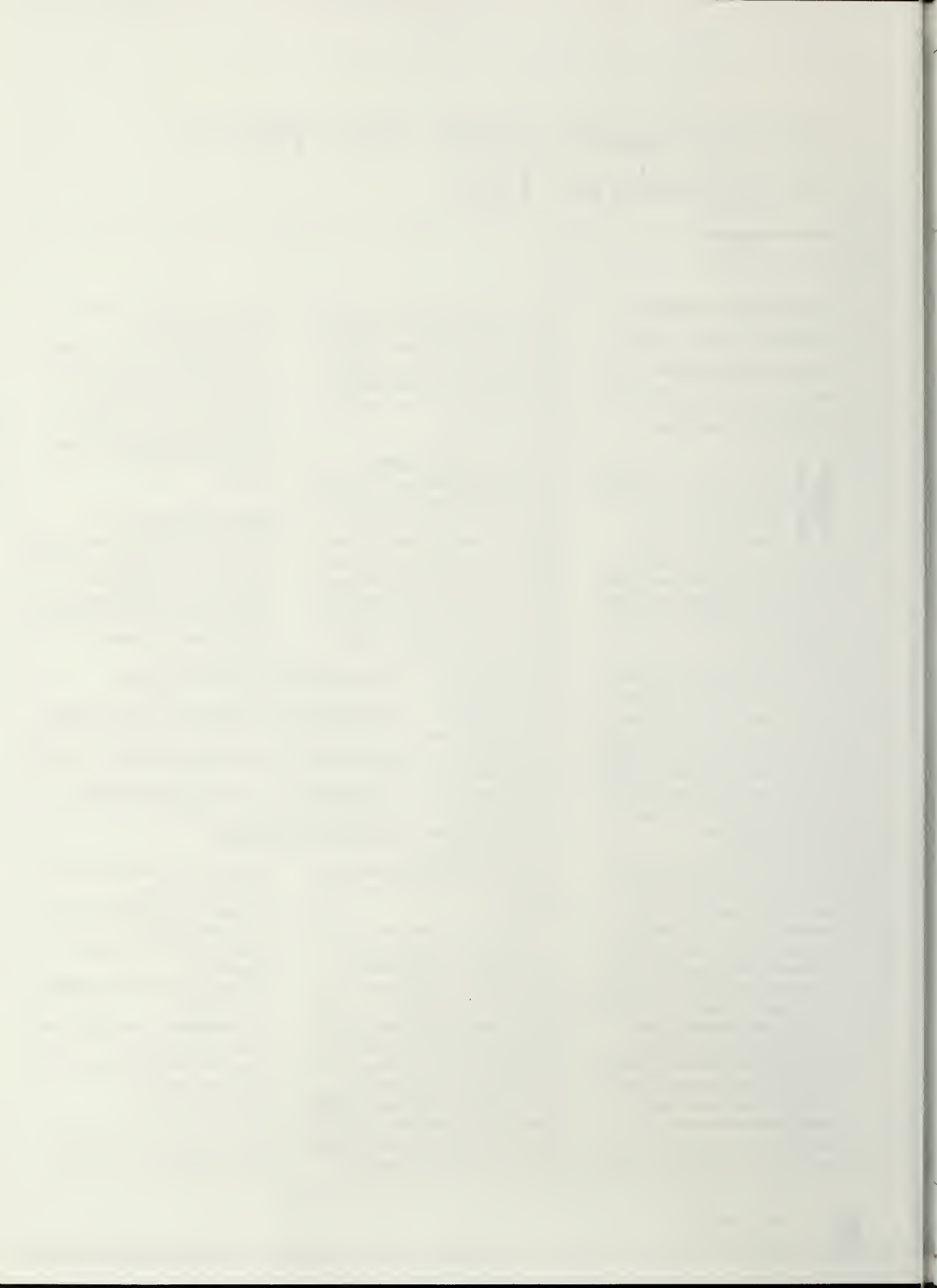
Character education manifests itself in teacher practice as respect for each student as a responsible, active learner. Model teachers understand that students require an environment of mutual trust and respect.

Character education manifests itself in teacher practice as respect for each student as a responsible, active learner.

How do model teachers behave? Students say that they:

- present clear, consistent, and sincere messages;
- do not pull rank—are never authoritarian;
- communicate high expectations;
- really listen;
- communicate their commitment through actions;
- are hard-working and really care about student learning;
- deserve respect.

The characteristics of a “model teacher” match Glasser’s (1990)





© Susie Fitzhugh

description of a "quality teacher." These teachers create classroom environments that are nurturing and risk-free, along the guidelines of constructivist theory as proposed by Vygotsky (Clark 1990). They are open-minded, direct, and nonjudgmental. Model teachers often use specific classroom situations as lead-ins to brief discussions about proper conduct and ethical behavior.

In such classrooms, teachers' enthusiasm and commitment are paralleled by students' enthusiasm and engagement in learning. Students do not work just to get the assigned work done—they are intrinsically motivated because they are doing meaningful work. Model teachers recognize students' contributions by restating them or posting them on the board. These teachers say things like, "There are no right and wrong answers." In such classrooms, students can make mistakes without condemnation from others.

Model teachers show their sincerity and concern for students through their daily actions. One of the exemplary teachers I observed had a commanding presence, yet was a noncoercive authority figure in the classroom. She moved among students freely, making eye contact

with them. She was observed to make individual requests only once, giving the impression that she did not repeat herself. In addition, she used inclusive language and cleared up misunderstandings as they arose: "All set? Are there any not with us?" Never angry with her students, she was patient yet persistent, saying, "It's your job. I can't do it for you."

This teacher was also skillful in delegating responsibilities to students without abandoning them. For example, one girl who was behind in a project looked sad because she had to continue working while others had free time. This teacher put her hand on the girl's shoulder and said, "I know this must be hard because you were sick last week. I'll help you get started. Then it won't take long." Respectful actions like this help build students' confidence.

A Closing Note

"Do as I say, not as I do" clearly does not work. Quality teaching, coupled with an ethic of caring and respect for students as learners, is a powerful combination of behaviors that creates a positive moral climate in the classroom. If our classrooms lack such an environment, we risk graduating future generations of citizens without a sense

of the common good, without respect for others and the environment, without tolerance or responsibility. ■

¹W. Bennett, (1985). "Core Democratic Values" [fairness, kindness, honesty, persistence, responsibility, love of country, respect, and courage], as described in the proposal for the *Boston University Character Project* submitted by K. Ryan and S. Ellenwood.

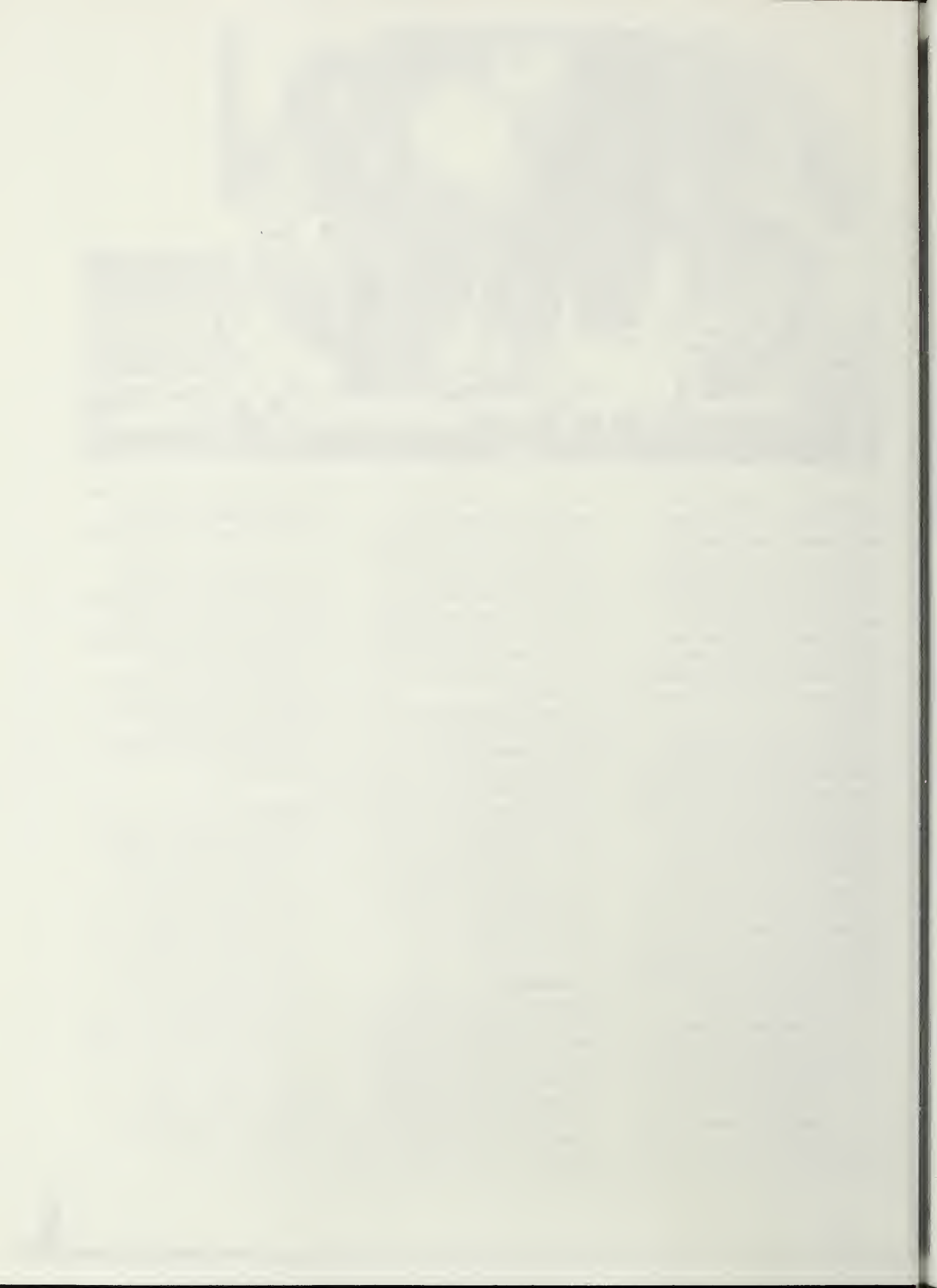
²The study was conducted for my dissertation. The completed study was published by *Dissertation Abstracts International* in January 1992.

³Eighteen teachers, 54 students, 12 administrators, and 18 parents participated in the study.

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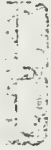
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The Healing Power of Altruism

Richard L. Curwin

For at-risk students, opportunities to help others may provide a way to break the devastating cycle of failure—to substitute caring for anger and replace low self-esteem with feelings of worth.

 Bill, a 4th grader in a rural community, was surly, fought constantly, and did little schoolwork. The best way to describe his home life was *toxic*: an alcoholic mother, a father in jail, few friends. Bill had already started

drinking heavily in times of stress.

In an unusual experiment, Bill's principal, school counselor, and teachers assigned him the task of helping a wheelchair-bound 1st grader on and off the bus everyday and being the child's protector. The only stipulation was that if Bill got into a fight, he couldn't help the 1st grader for the remainder of the day.

Bill took his assignment seriously, watching over the younger child like a mother might watch her baby. The children became friends, and one day when the younger student was ill, a teacher saw a tear coming out of Bill's eye. Bill did not become a model student. He still fought on occasion and struggled academically. But his attitude changed significantly. Someone was depending on him, and he felt needed and important.

For students with poor academic achievement, classrooms are a breeding ground for feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness. At-risk students are continually confronted with failure and told they are worthless. Many schools try to compensate by offering special programs to increase self-esteem. However, even the best activities do not significantly influence children who continually receive negative messages about themselves. Children are acutely aware of where they stand in the school community and how teachers and other students perceive them. Thus, a "Catch-22" is created. Students will rarely be successful in school without hopeful attitudes, but they need to be successful before they can feel optimistic.

One way to break this cycle is to actualize the basic human need to be altruistic. Two decades of

declining altruism in our culture show how powerful this need is, and what happens when it is ignored.

Feeling Good About Doing Good

When we help at-risk students, we inadvertently give them the message that they are in an inferior position. Reversing this role builds pride. Students feel good when they see themselves as genuinely useful. Helping others is therapeutic. No smiley faces, silly marbles, or point systems are necessary. Altruism is an antidote to cynicism, encouraging those who "couldn't care less," to begin to "care more."

To understand the power of helping others, ask yourself which enhances your self-concept more: Someone you love says "I need you," or someone you love says "You need me."

My son David illustrated this phenomenon when he was a sophomore in high school. I was asked to help a group of teachers work through a serious school problem. When one of the key teachers canceled an hour before the meeting because her baby-sitter couldn't make it, David saved the day by volunteering to take care of her 4-year-old at the school site.

When David and I arrived, the child was cranky and wouldn't leave his mother's side. Several teachers tried to distract him by making things with his Legos. Intuitively, David sat beside the boy and asked what the Legos were. The child said, "You build things with them." David asked the child to show him how to build something. For the duration of the meeting, the youngster taught David how to make things with Legos. Why did the child resist learning about Legos, but eagerly teach about them? Because as a teacher, he was competent, important—and in control. The same phenomenon applies to at-risk children.

Creating Helping Opportunities

Educational settings offer a wide variety of helping opportunities, but additional ones can be created with a little careful planning. Time can also be found before and after school or during free-time activity, lunch, study hall, or recess. Here are some points to remember:



1. *Select opportunities that are genuine.* It is hard to disguise an artificial situation to look authentic. Students see through the rhetoric quickly and respond cynically.

2. *Choose tasks that match the ability of the student.* Not all students have the ability to be helpful in the same way. Do not ask students to help by doing a task that will most likely lead to failure. On the other hand, be careful not to pick demeaning chores that are beneath the student's ability. If a child has a specific skill or ability, try to use it in choosing a helping task.

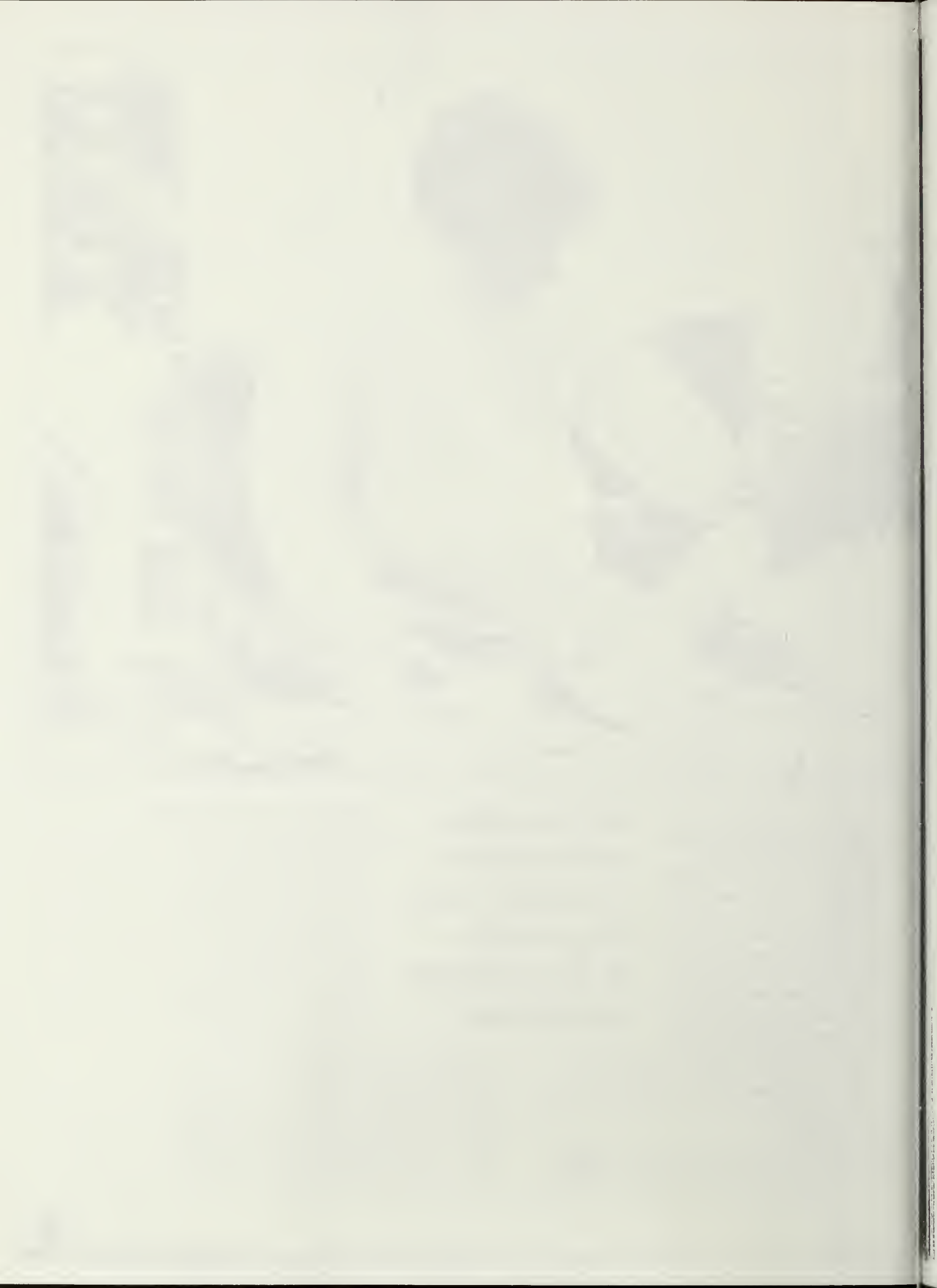
3. *Make the opportunities optional.* Forcing students to help will not only increase resistance but will minimize the healing effect. If students are

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required to perform helping tasks, they will have trouble taking credit for what they do.

4. *Do not praise the helper, especially in public.* The goal of helping is to give the student an internal feeling of worth. Public acknowledgment is an external reward, and it can cheapen the experience. If you want to express your appreciation, do it privately, and as simply as possible.

Eventually, if a student has clearly shown a change in attitude and behavior, the best way to bestow public honor is in the context of recognizing other students as well, without singling any one out. Focus on the internal gains, and keep the pressure off. A student in the formative stages of helping still doubts whether or not he or she can



succeed. Undue public praise may undermine the potential benefits.

5. *Do not worry about rewarding negative behavior.* Educators may mistakenly ask, "Why let the kids who are always in trouble get to do something fun?" Rewarding negative behavior, a partially accurate description, is a trivial consequence compared to the good that can result. Giving at-risk students the opportunity to help others will not induce "good kids" to suddenly behave badly because they want to be helpers. If this fear exists, quell it by giving all students the opportunity to be helpful.

6. *Provide a variety of possibilities.* Develop different kinds of helpful activities to meet various needs: some once a week, others every day; some at the school site, others in the community; some informal and some involving academic credit.

7. *Have students help others with similar problems.* Sometimes students can resolve their own problems by helping others with the same difficulty. Students who are loud in the hall often make good hall monitors. Students who fight on the playground can frequently stop others from fighting. Because they understand the problem from a different perspective, they can sometimes be more effective than teachers and, in the process, learn to see their own behavior more objectively.

8. *Provide enough time for positive results to occur.* Don't expect instant results. Give the healing effect of helping time to occur, at least a month or two. As long as things are not getting worse, stay with the process.

9. *Make sure those being helped want to be helped.* Diagnostic questioning of reluctant helpees might identify certain conditions under which gentle persuasion would lead them to give it a try. Some helpees



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might be reluctant to work with students who have a "poor reputation"—a situation that might be altered when the helping student has a chance to show another side of his or her personality. However, if the resistance is too strong, don't push it.

10. *Set up reasonable expectations.* There is nothing wrong with requiring students to earn the privilege of helping by establishing reasonable standards of behavior. Students can expect to temporarily lose this privilege if they fight or behave in other unacceptable ways. When setting up expectations:

- Tailor them for the individual student. Don't require a student to do something beyond his or her ability nor to do an unfamiliar task. Use the helping opportunity as motivation to alter behavior, not to screen out potential helpers.

- Be flexible. Begin with light expectations, and gradually increase or decrease them in response to the student's progress.

- When a student fails to meet the expectations, keep the time he or she is removed from the helping situation short—a day or two. The message of the reprimand should focus on the mistake, not the student's unworthiness as a helper.

- Make sure that administrators or teachers who might have negative attitudes about certain students, because of labels or previous conflicts, do not block students from helping.

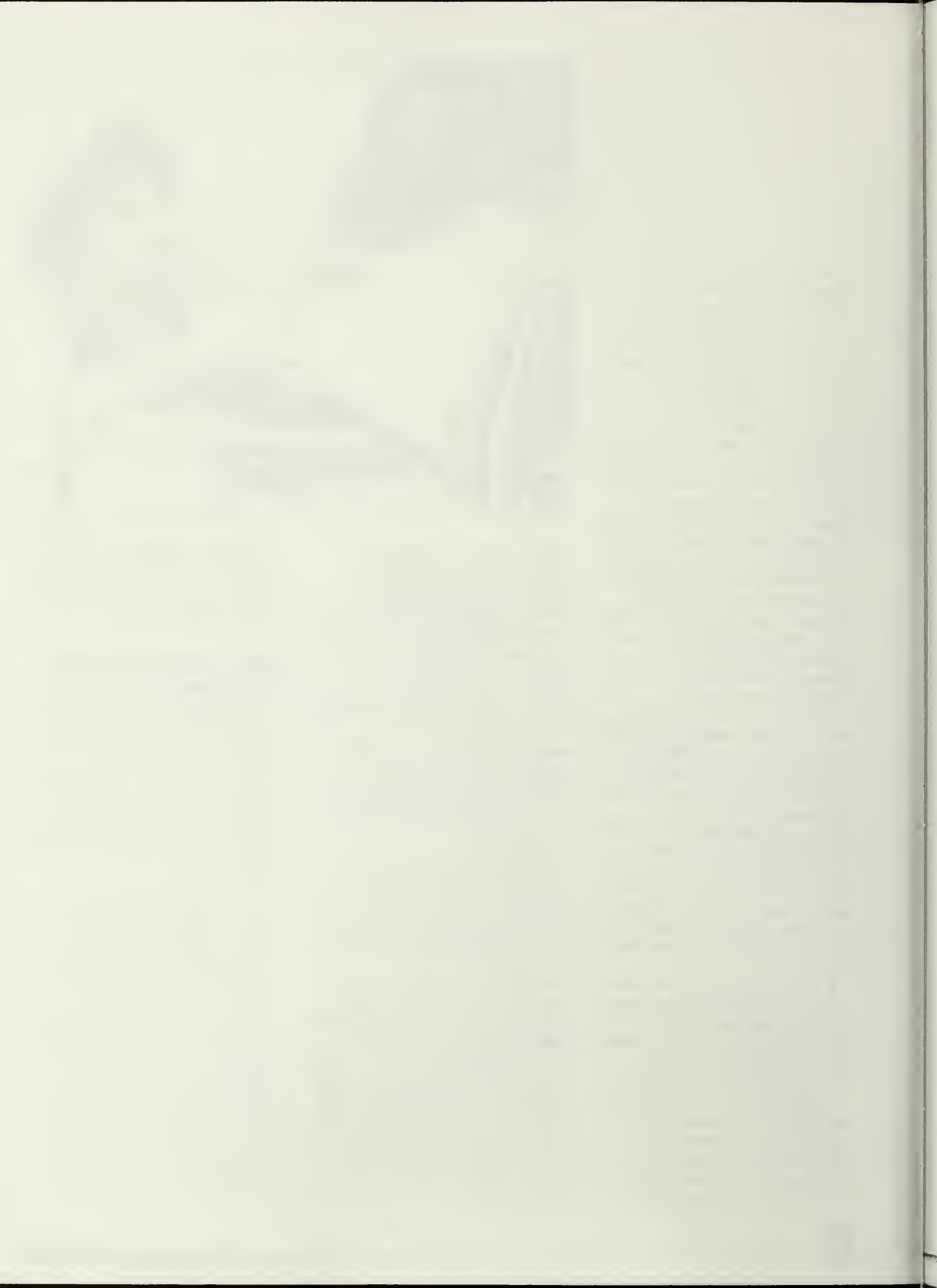
Examples of Helping Opportunities

Many opportunities are available for students to participate in helping activities—both within and outside the school day. Here are some examples.

■ Tutoring younger students.

Having students instruct younger children can be a positive educational experience as long as tutors are monitored to ensure that they don't communicate false information or errors. Here's an example.

After attending a *Discipline with Dignity* workshop, Vicki Hartzig, a 1st grade teacher in Michigan, thought of how helping might benefit a rowdy 4th grade student in her school. Tom typically was dressed slovenly, swore voraciously, and refused to try even the simplest assignment. After careful negotiations with his teacher and the principal—who were reluctant at first to reward negative behavior with a "positive" opportunity—Hartzig invited Tom into her class to tutor any students who needed help. He could come once a day as long as he was relatively neat, did not swear,



Altruism is an antidote to cynicism, encouraging those who "couldn't care less," to begin to "care more."

and caused no problems with her students. If none of her students needed help, Tom could sit quietly and do his schoolwork until a need arose.

Within a week, the 1st graders cheered when Tom entered the room. They fought over whom he would help first. Tom began combing his hair and tucking in his shirt before entering the room. He was polite and friendly. One day, after struggling to teach a concept to a 1st grader, he told Mrs. Hartzig, "Boy, being a teacher is harder than I thought."

Tom's regular teacher noticed a distinct change in his attitude. At first, he still did little work, but was not rude or mean. Later, he began trying his assignments and even asked for help when he didn't understand how to do something.

■ *Performing for other students.* Another way students can help is to read to or to act for peers or younger students. Performing might also include creating school- or classroom-related artwork, such as posters or decorations.

My colleague Al Mendler works a couple of times a month in a facility for juvenile delinquents, teenagers convicted of criminal acts, in upstate New York. He describes how difficult it is to reach many of the hard cases, especially youth who come from the streets of New York City. One of his most successful strategies is to bring in professional clowns, who teach the adolescents how to dress and act like clowns. The clowns-in-training then put on performances for hospital-bound kids. The young patients love the show, and the teenagers, in turn, get to feel needed. Mendler reports that behavior of these youths improves for significant lengths of time and that they are much more reachable to discuss their problems.

■ *Serving as monitors.* Another avenue for helping is to have students serve as hall, bathroom, or playground monitors. The sense of responsibility students gain is beneficial to their self-esteem.

■ *Performing administrative/secretarial tasks.* Students can also help teachers and administrators by taking attendance, collecting papers, making phone calls in the office, running duplicating machines, delivering written messages, collating materials, or answering phones. While it is almost always preferable for a student to work with people than it is to, say, sweep floors, some of these types of tasks can be helpful for some students.

■ *Serving as task force leaders.* Task forces composed of students can be given the responsibility of developing suggestions for school or classroom problems. Give as many leadership opportunities as possible to the target students.

■ *Raising money for school programs or charity.* The traditional bake sales and selling candy are obvious examples. Others might include collecting cans or bottles for deposit, auctioning off students to act as helpers, and doing odd jobs for local businesses, especially ones that sponsor schools.

■ *Being a big brother/sister.* With the help of community service experts, educators can set up big brother/sister programs in schools and teach skills to the target students. Some students might even have had big brothers or sisters themselves and understand how to behave in this role.

■ *Assisting disabled youngsters or nursing home residents.* To find suitable recipients, schools can work with special education programs and community service agencies. An experiment that has been tried in California, and is now spreading to other

areas of the country, regularly brings tough adolescents from alternative schools to geriatric nursing homes and hospitals for physically disabled children. These youths—many of whom have been involved in gangs—read stories, help with exercises, and in general do what they can to be helpful.

The results have been remarkable. For a majority of the youths in the program, significant changes in attitudes and behaviors have occurred. Having formed close attachments with the people they help, they go out of their way to listen to their problems and offer advice. Not only do these formerly difficult youths become enthusiastic and reliable about their new roles, but many say they want to go into a "helping profession."

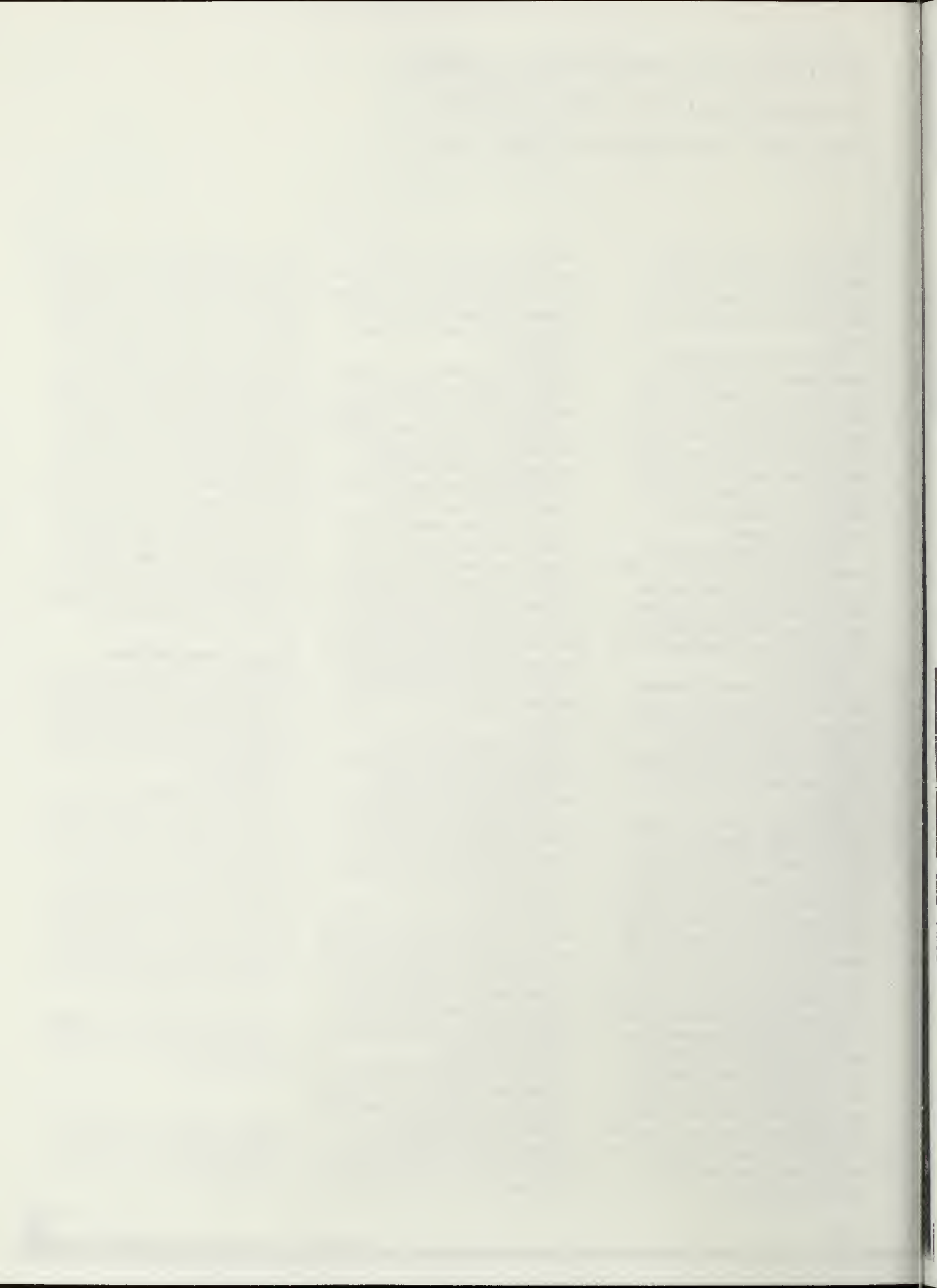
Replacing Anger with Caring

These examples illustrate that altruism is a powerful concept. When given the responsibility to be caretakers, tutors, and helpers of people in need, at-risk students respond responsibly—often in dramatic ways.

No longer do the labels "bad," "slow," or "at-risk" apply. The change in labeling comes not from discussions or activities about self-concept, but from genuine experiences. Those who are helped don't see the students as failures, so the labels become inappropriate. The attitudes of all concerned are forced to adjust. And changes in attitudes lead to hope—something that at-risk students desperately need.

Author's note: This article was adapted from my 1992 book, *Rediscovering Hope: Our Greatest Teaching Strategy*. (Bloomington, Ind.: N.E.S.).

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Growing Up Responsible

Thomas Woehrle

From making holiday decorations for a local nursing home to serving food at a homeless shelter, students at a Quaker school participate in service activities designed to match their level of social awareness.

Why do some service activities succeed and others fail to engage student interest at a particular age level? For example, why does making up Thanksgiving baskets appeal to the middle years? Why don't young children enjoy raising funds for Save the

students—from age 3 to seniors in high school. Yet an answer to the underlying question *why* escaped us until we were directed

to Robert L. Selman's developmental stage theory of social perspective (1980).¹

Developmental Stage Theory

Selman views his work as parallel to former colleague Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development. His theory is based on George Herbert Mead's stages of social understanding and Jean Piaget's cognitive stages. Within the framework of Mead/Piaget theory, Selman and his associates carried out research in schools as well as in situations created for their specific purposes.

Selman discerns five sequential stages in human development of social awareness and understanding.² In *Stage 0*, a person understands and treats others and self as no more than physical entities. Relationships are physical and momentary. In *Stage 1*, one perceives oneself as a person and responds positively to those who treat him or her as a person. Understanding is self-centered. Others are not discerned as being persons. Relationships are temporary, lasting only as long as the self finds them useful. In *Stage 2*, a person acknowledges the personhood of others. Partnerships that involve bilateral cooperation can now be formed.

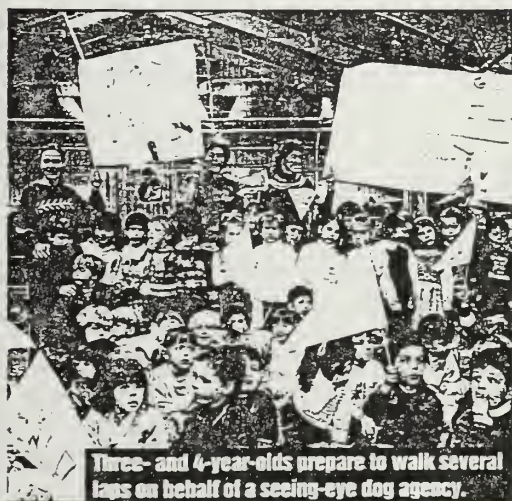
For Selman, the crucial stage in the development of social perspective is the movement to *Stage 3*. Relationships are now understood to involve

mutual sharing. Mature persons function well at this level.³ At *Stage 4*, a person has fully developed the capacity to form complex relationships with others. Individuals are complex self-systems who develop autonomous independence capable of pluralistic organization.

What Younger Students Can Do

Selman's developmental theory of social perspective illuminates the experiences of teachers at Friends Academy. Our 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds are in *Stage 0*. The 3s enjoy feeding birds, raising frogs, and caring for a rabbit. The 4s make decorations for nursing homes and soup kitchens and, with the help of 6th graders, wrap Christmas gifts for needy children. The 5-year-olds begin to understand community in terms of physical proximity. They are also learning how to get along with others without fighting and to resolve conflicts by talking through problems. At this level, children cannot understand appeals to help others with whom they do not have physical contact. Therefore, they cannot understand what it means to, for instance, aid children in Bolivia through Save the Children or to participate in a "Chain of Hope" during the Persian Gulf conflict.

In grades 1 and 2, we see the emergence of *Stage 1*. Children are becoming aware of their own feelings, but are not yet able to feel genuinely for others. Much effort must be invested in helping them learn that being a good neighbor means treating others as friends. Therefore, community service projects should go beyond making holiday decorations to delivering them in person to the residents of a nursing home. At the end of each



Children? Why does shopping for senior citizens have great appeal to high school seniors?

Questions like these have puzzled the faculty at Friends Academy for many years, as we've sought to express our service-oriented Quaker philosophy in activities appropriate for students at each age level. During the past 20 years, we have discovered, through trial and error, what works and what doesn't work with our



Courtesy of Friends Academy

From grades 5 through 8, students can carry out complex projects that reach farther and farther beyond their immediate environment.

day, our 2nd graders meet one-on-one with a teacher to reflect on the question: Was I a good friend today?"

Stage 1 development continues in 3rd and 4th grades. Students begin to understand that others have great physical needs and that their actions can make a difference in the lives of others. They enjoy making Thanksgiving baskets for local families but see no point in helping distant charities that are unable to respond personally to their efforts. At Stage 1, the self is at the center: She is *my* friend. I helped someone else.

Stage 1 development continues from grades 5 through 8. Students can plan and carry out complex projects that reach farther and farther beyond their immediate environment. The self is seen as the center of an increasingly larger world with great needs and unlimited opportunities for service. For example:

- Our 5th graders begin to understand conceptually what volunteerism entails by participating in a can recycling project and supporting a Native American child in the Southwest.

- Students in 6th grade are active in environmental cleanups, recycling activities, and tree plantings. Through a hunger awareness simulation game, they realize in a small way the injustice of food distribution.

- By organizing a walk-a-thon to help the Kurds in Iraq, our 7th graders raised \$8,000.

- Our 8th graders help people from the ages of 5 to 21 participate in games for the physically challenged. They also hold bake sales in support of soup kitchens and serve meals in a nearby soup kitchen.

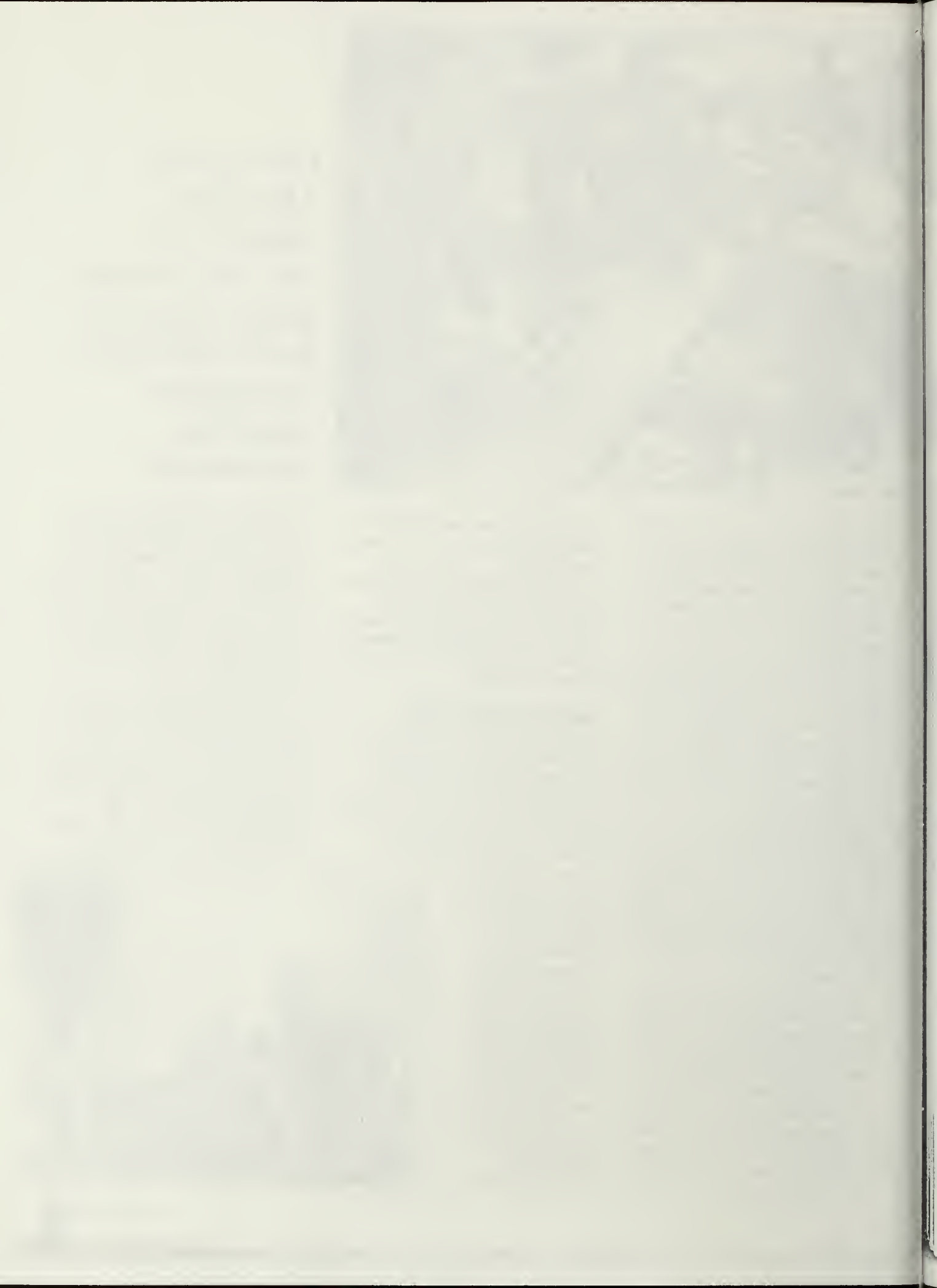
How Older Students Can Help

While signs of Stage 2 development are seen in 8th and 9th grades, complete emergence takes place for the majority of our students in 10th grade during an overnight trip to New York City. This trip climaxes a required one-term course entitled "Poverty, Homelessness, and Community Service." The experience begins with students preparing an evening meal and sharing it with the occupants of several homeless shelters. Later that evening, they deliver sandwiches to homeless people who have taken up shelter in Grand Central Station. The following day, students prepare and

serve lunch at various soup kitchens. How do our 10th graders react to this experience? They are amazed at the intelligence, insight, and experience of the homeless and hungry people they meet. These individuals are no longer distant objects in need of help but people who have feelings, ideas, and interests "just like me."

Our extensive high school community service program offers ample opportunity for Stage 2 service. Once students discover the needs of other persons, they are eager to help in ways that recognize the personhood of those being served. After school, our students can serve in day-care centers, tutoring centers, and nursing homes.





Fostering Resiliency in Kids

Bonnie Benard

Despite overwhelming adversity, many children successfully manage to bounce back. What personal characteristics make this possible, and how can schools create environments that support these children?

Much attention has been focused recently on "at risk" children, especially those who face poverty, neglect, abuse, physical handicaps, war, or the mental illnesses, alcoholism, or criminality of their parents. Amazingly, while researchers have found that these children do develop more problems than the general population, they have also learned that a great percentage of the children become healthy, competent young adults.

For example, Michael Rutter's research on children growing up in adverse conditions found that half of the children did not repeat that pattern in their own adult lives (1985). Emmy Werner's ongoing, 38-year study of the children of Kauai found that one-third of the children having four or more risk factors during their childhood were doing fine by adolescence. By age 32, two-thirds of the children who did develop problems during adolescence were leading successful adult lives (Werner and Smith 1992).

The repeated documentation of this "resiliency"—the ability to bounce back successfully despite exposure to severe risks—has clearly established the self-righting nature of human development. Furthermore, several longitudinal studies of children growing up in adversity have identified protective factors in the child, family, school, and community that can buffer life's stresses.

While as educators we need to understand the stresses that are part of

children's lives, we must move beyond a focus on the "risk factors" and problems in order to create the conditions that will facilitate children's healthy development. A growing body of research tells us what young people need to overcome the risks they face (Benard 1991).

We must move beyond a focus on the "risk factors" in order to create the conditions that will facilitate children's healthy development.

Profile of the Resilient Child

According to the literature, the resilient child is one who "works well, plays well, loves well, and expects well." Resilient children usually have four attributes: social competence, problem-solving skills, autonomy, and a sense of purpose and future.

Social competence includes qualities such as responsiveness—especially the ability to elicit positive responses from others—flexibility, empathy, caring, communication

skills, and a sense of humor. From early childhood on, resilient children tend to establish positive relationships with both adults and peers that help bond them to their family, school, and community.

Problem-solving skills encompass the abilities to think abstractly and reflectively and to be able to attempt alternate solutions for both cognitive and social problems. Two skills are especially important: planning, which facilitates seeing oneself in control; and resourcefulness in seeking help from others. The literature on children growing up in slums provides an extreme example of the role these skills play in the development of resiliency; these children must continually negotiate the demands of their environment or die (Felsman 1989).

Autonomy is having a sense of one's own identity and an ability to act independently and exert some control over one's environment. Several researchers have also identified the ability to separate oneself from a dysfunctional family environment—to detach enough from parental distress to maintain outside pursuits and satisfactions—as the major characteristic of resilient children growing up in families with alcoholism and mental illness (Berlin and Davis 1989).

A sense of purpose entails having goals, educational aspirations, persistence, hopefulness, and a sense of a bright future. Werner and Smith conclude that:

The central component of effective coping with the multiplicity of inevitable life stresses appears to be a sense of coherence, a feeling of confidence that one's internal and external environment is predictable and that things will probably work out as well as can be reasonably expected (1989).





When looking at this profile of a resilient child, we must look beyond personality traits and the ever-present temptation to "blame the victim" or "fix the kid" and examine the environmental characteristics that have fostered the development of resilience. From the research, three main characteristics have protected children growing up in adversity, and are characterized by (1) caring and supportive, (2) positive expectations, and (3) ongoing opportunities for participation.

A Caring Environment

Given the incredible stresses the family system is now experiencing, school has become a vital refuge for a growing number of children, serving as a "protective shield to help children withstand the multiple vicissitudes that they can expect of a stressful world" (Garmezy 1991). James Garbarino, who researched resiliency

in children living in war conditions, including inner-cities in the United States, tells us

Despite the intense caring pressures in the environment, 75 to 85 percent of the children in the study in activities as a caring community, at its heart and center, and the children are sensitive to the caring of others. (Garbarino et al. 1992)

The above research is consistent with research that views the school as a powerful indicator of positive culture for youth. World War II veteran research acknowledges that "early studies have examined the role of teachers as protective buffers in the lives of children who overcome great adversity," she found that

among the most frequently encountered positive childhood experience of the children of Holocaust outside of the family circle was a favorite teacher. For the resilient youngsters, a special teacher

was not just an instructor for academic skills, but also a confidant and positive model for personal identification (1990).

Further documenting the power of a caring teacher is Sarah Moskowitz's 30-to-40-year follow-up study of childhood survivors of the Nazi Holocaust. Following World War II, children from concentration camps and orphanages were sent to a therapeutic nursery school in England. All 24 of the resilient survivors "considered *one* woman to be among the most potent influences in their lives—the nursery school teacher who provided warmth and caring, and taught them to behave compassionately" (1983).

Reinforcing these findings, Nel Noddings's research into the power of caring relationships at school found that

at a time when the traditional structures of caring have deteriorated, schools must become places where teachers and students live together, talk with each other, take delight in each other's company (1988).

The need for caring teachers was also a major concern of high school students. According to a study done by Stanford University's Center for Research on the Context of Secondary School Teaching,

the number of student references to wanting caring teachers is so great that we believe it speaks to the quiet desperation and loneliness of many adolescents in today's society (Phelan et al. 1992).

An independent study by the Institute for Education in Transformation at Claremont Graduate School found similar concerns (1992).

While we cannot overemphasize the importance of the teacher as caregiver,



we must not overlook the role of caring peers and friends in the school and community environments. Research into the resiliency of "street gamins" clearly identifies peer support as critical to the survival of these young people (Felsman 1989). Similarly, Werner found caring friends to be a major factor in the development of resiliency in the disadvantaged population in Kauai (Werner and Smith 1989).

Resilient youth take the opportunity to fulfill the basic human need for social support, caring, and love. If this opportunity is unavailable to them in their immediate family environment, it is imperative that the school give them the chance to develop caring relationships.

Positive Expectations

Research has shown that schools that establish high expectations for *all* kids—and give them the support necessary to live up to the expectations—have incredibly high rates of academic success. Rutter found that schools within poverty-stricken areas of London showed considerable differences in rates of delinquency, behavioral disturbance, attendance, and academic attainment (even after controlling for family risk factors). The successful schools shared certain characteristics: an academic emphasis, teachers' clear expectations and regulations, a high level of student participation, and alternative resources such as library facilities, vocational work opportunities, art, music, and extracurricular activities (Rutter et al. 1979). In her research, Judith Brook found that high expectations and a school-wide ethos that values student participation also mitigated the most powerful risk factor for adolescent alcohol and drug use—peers who use drugs (Brook et al. 1989).

Researcher Rhona Weinstein identifies the following ways through which we can communicate positive, high expectations to students (1991):

The Child Development Project

The Child Development Project (CDP) is a comprehensive program aimed at fostering children's ethical, social, and intellectual development. At its philosophical core is the idea that values must be *experienced* as well as taught.

Mobility and demographic changes have robbed many children of close, trusting relationships. Because these are critical to development, CDP schools seek to become "caring communities," where children feel valued, connected, and responsible to others. Project teachers shape many facets of elementary school life:

The *curriculum* gives children opportunities to work collaboratively and to explore—through literature, history, science—what it means to be a principled, caring human being.

Discipline emphasizes problem solving, not punishment.

Motivational practices focus children's attention on the joys inherent in ethical conduct and in learning—not on external rewards or punishments.

Schoolwide culture enables all children—not just the best-behaved or highest-achieving—to be contributing members of the school community.

Family activities make the school a welcoming place that helps children deepen their bonds with family members.

In CDP schools, teachers spend up to 30 days over three years in staff development that explores how discipline practices, cooperative learning, literature-based reading, schoolwide events, and parent outreach can foster

children's ethical and intellectual development. At weekly partner study meetings, teachers share successes and problems in their pursuit of these common goals.

Ultimately, though, each CDP school finds its own way to make close, trusting relationships central to school life. Schools invent new traditions and reshape existing ones as they reweave the fabric of school life to emphasize values of kindness, fairness, and personal responsibility.

Research on attachment and intrinsic motivation provides strong evidence that trusting, mutually satisfying relationships are critical to character development. Evidence links character development to the sense of community within a school.

Originally developed in collaboration with the San Ramon and Hayward school districts in California, CDP has been the focus of an intensive longitudinal study over the past 12 years. Recently, the project has expanded to districts in Cupertino, San Francisco, and Salinas, Calif.; Dade County, Fla.; Jefferson County, Ky.; and White Plains, N.Y. In these districts, a group of 24 program and comparison schools will be studied extensively over four years.

For more information, contact the Developmental Studies Center, 2000 Embarcadero, Suite 305, Oakland, CA 94606-5300. ■

—Eric Schaps, Catherine C. Lewis,
and Marilyn Watson

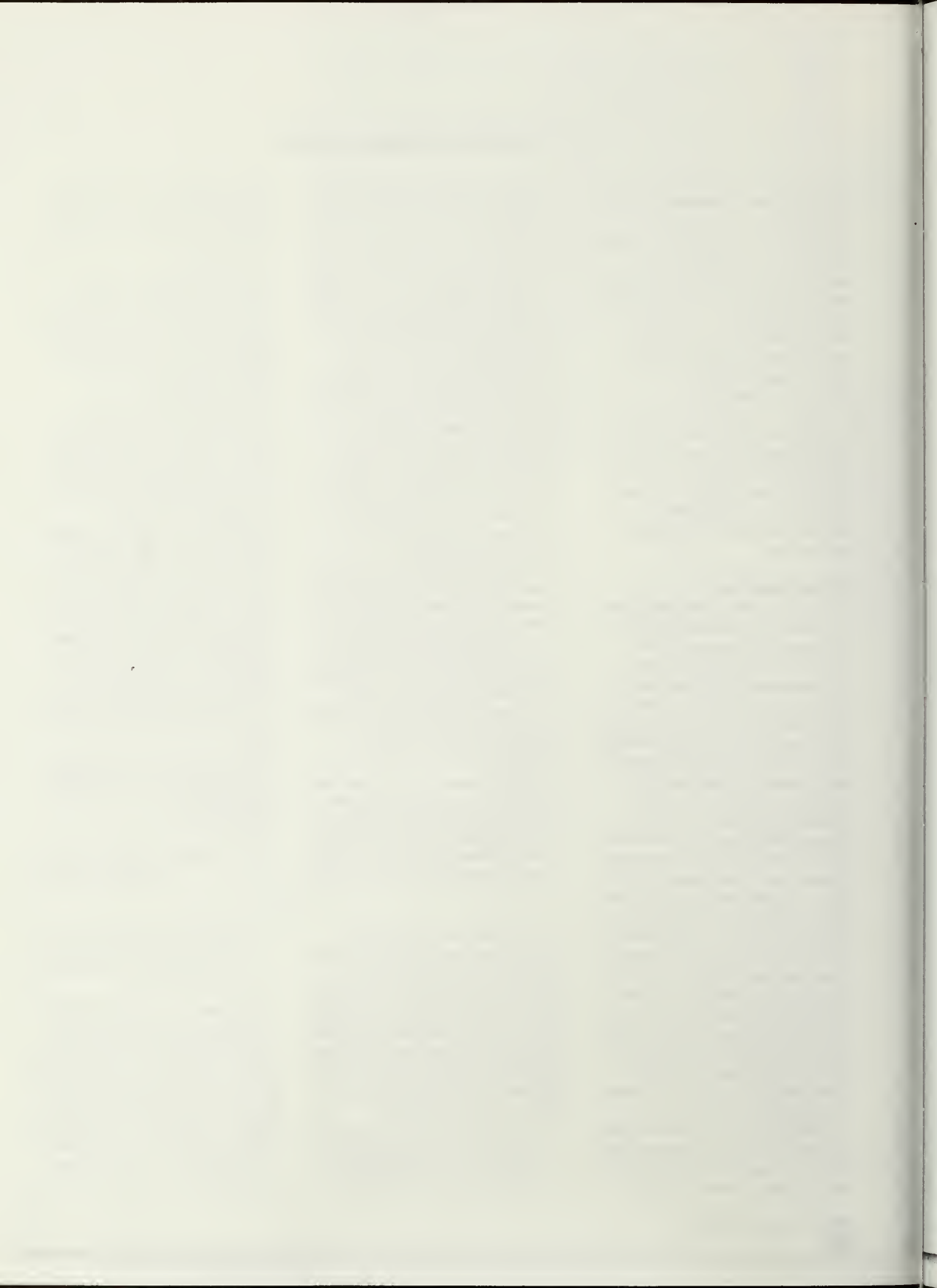
Teacher behavior and attitudes. Teachers who convey the message that "this work is important: I know you can do it; I won't give up on you" and who play to the strengths of each child exert a powerful motivating influence, especially on students who receive the opposite message from their families and communities. In *Among School Children*, Tracy Kidder says:

For children who are used to thinking of themselves as stupid or not worth talking to or deserving rape and beatings, a good teacher can provide an

astonishing revelation. A good teacher can give a child at least a chance to feel. "She thinks I'm worth something; maybe I am" (1990).

Jeff Howard's work through the Efficacy Institute found that children in inner-city Detroit schools achieved more when they were directly taught that intellectual development is something they all can achieve through effort, as compared to something only some people are born with (1990).

Curriculum. A rich and varied curriculum provides opportunities for



Given the incredible stresses the family system is now experiencing, school has become a vital refuge for a growing number of children.

students to be successful not just in academics but also in the arts, in sports, in community service, in work apprenticeship, and in helping peers. In doing so, it communicates the message that the unique strengths of each individual are valued. Schools that integrate academic and vocational education for all their students convey the message that both skills are vital to future success. A multicultural curriculum tells children of color that their cultural roots and languages are valued.

Evaluation. Schools that encourage young people do not rely on standardized tests that assess only one or two types of intelligences (usually linguistic and logical-mathematical). Instead, they use multiple approaches, especially authentic assessments, that promote self-reflection and validate the different types of intelligences, strengths, and learning styles children possess.

Motivation and responsibility for learning. Schools that are especially successful in promoting resiliency build on students' intrinsic motivation and interests through a varied and rich curriculum that encourages cooperation instead of competition. Furthermore, active student participation and decision making in both the curriculum and evaluation foster students' responsibility and ownership for learning.

Grouping. How we group children in our classrooms and schools powerfully communicates expectations. The research of Jeannie Oakes and others has documented the deleterious effects of tracking on low-achieving students (1985). Conversely, Anne Wheelock's recent book relates the positive effects of untracked schools on students' aspirations (1992). An enormous body of research points to the consistent positive academic and social outcomes of heterogeneous, cooperative learning groups for all students, especially for low-achievers.

Labeling students "at-risk" can set

in motion a vicious self-fulfilling prophecy. No matter how well-meaning, targeted programs that label children as "at risk" may be doing more harm than good. As educator Herb Kohl states:

Although I've taught in East Harlem, in Berkeley, and in rural California, I have never taught an *at-risk* student in my life. The term is racist. It defines a child as pathological, based on what he or she might do rather than on anything he or she has actually done (Nathan 1991).

Furthermore, research consistently shows us that 50 to 80 percent of students with multiple risks in their lives do succeed, especially if they experience a caring school environment that conveys high expectations.

Youth Participation

Providing youth with the opportunities for meaningful involvement and responsibility within the school is a natural outcome in schools that have high expectations. According to Rutter, in the schools with low levels of delinquency, children

were given a lot of responsibility. They participated very actively in all sorts of things that went on in the school; they were treated as responsible people and they reacted accordingly (Rutter et al. 1979).

The High/Scope Educational Research Foundation's 15-year study of the Perry Preschool Project demonstrates the importance of creating opportunities for participation from an early age. This study discovered that when children from an impoverished inner-city environment were given the

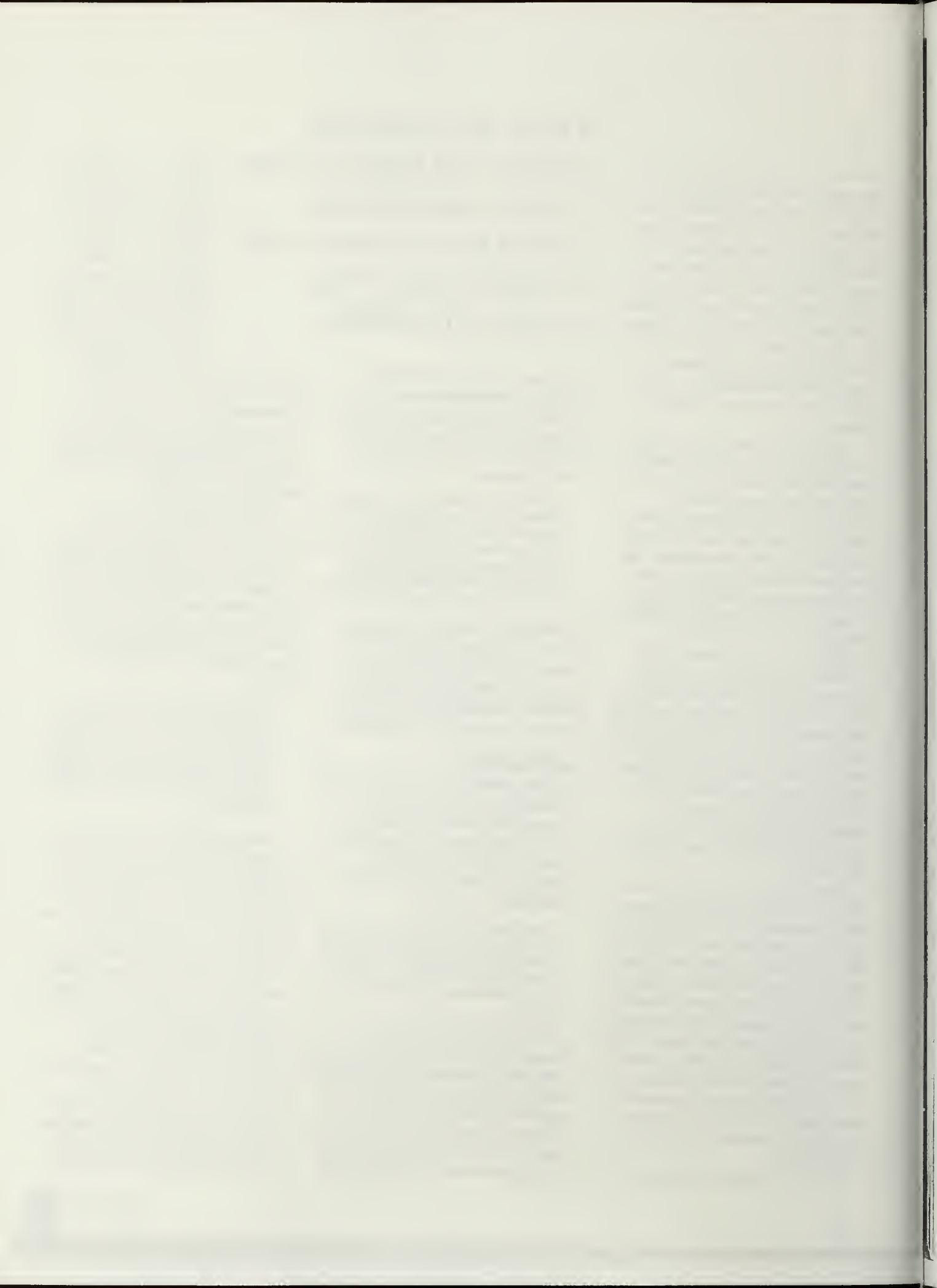
opportunities to plan and make decisions in their preschool, they were, at the age of 19, significantly less (as much as 50 percent) involved in drug use, delinquency, teen pregnancy, or school failure (Berruta-Clement et al. 1984). Furthermore, the recently published

study of this population at age 27 found that project participants have committed far fewer crimes, have higher earnings, and possess a greater commitment to marriage than adults from similar backgrounds (Weikart and Schweinhart 1993).

Participation, like caring and support, is a fundamental human need—the need to have some control over one's life. Several educational reformers believe that when schools ignore these basic needs of both kids and adults, they become alienating places (Glasser 1990, Wehlage et al. 1989). According to Seymour Sarason:

When one has no stake in the way things are, when one's needs or opinions are provided no forum, when one sees oneself as the object of unilateral actions, it takes no particular wisdom to suggest that one would rather be elsewhere (1990).

The challenge for our schools is to engage children by providing them opportunities to participate in meaningful activities and roles. There are many ways to infuse participation into the school day. Some examples include: giving students more opportunities to respond to questions; asking their opinions on issues; asking questions that encourage critical, reflective thinking; making learning more hands-on; involving students in curriculum planning; using participatory evaluation strategies; and employing approaches like cooperative learning, peer helping, cross-age mentoring, and community service. Such strategies bond young people to



To see the strengths in children, teachers must be able to see their own strengths.

their school community and can promote all the traits of resiliency—social competence, problem solving, autonomy, and a sense of a bright future.

Acknowledge Your Resiliency

Evidence demonstrates that a nurturing school climate has the power to overcome incredible risk factors in the lives of children. What is far less acknowledged is that creating this climate for students necessitates creating this environment for all school personnel. Paraphrasing Sarason, whatever factors, variables, and ambience are conducive for the growth, development, and self-regard of students are precisely those that are crucial to obtaining the same consequences for a school's staff (1990).

It's hard to be caring and supportive, to have high expectations, and to involve students in decision making without support, respect, or opportunities to work collegially with others. Fostering resiliency in young people is ultimately an "inside-out" process that depends on educators taking care of themselves. In *Winning Teachers, Teaching Winners*, Patricia Munson advises teachers to

choose to see yourself and others as winners. Look for things to acknowledge yourself for, rather than stuff to make yourself feel wrong about. No one outside yourself can make you happy. You have to do it for yourself. And your students need to learn that, too. It is one of the keys that will assist them to be able to create anything they want in their lives (1991).

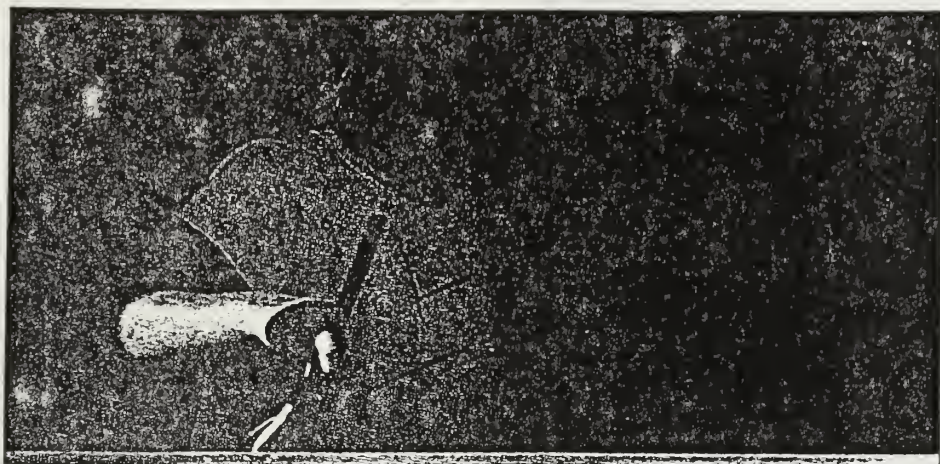
To see the strengths in children, we must see our own strengths; to look beyond their risks and see their resiliency means acknowledging our own inner resiliency. ■

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In Search of Effective Character Education

James S. Leming

If research is to inform the practice of character education, more and better evaluation of existing programs is needed.

of this century, character education became a major preoccupation. Such factors as increasing industrialization and urbanization, the continuing tide of immigration, World War I, the Bolshevik Revolution, and the spirit of the Roaring '20s, contributed to a mood among the population and among educators that social stability was being threatened and that moral standards needed to be strengthened. During the 1920s and 1930s, virtually every school in America was responding in some way to the educational goal of developing character (McClellan 1992, Yulish 1980).

The current revival of interest in character education, if it is to succeed, will have to successfully address the question of the assessment of program effectiveness. Today, unlike the beginning of this century, a body of research exists related to the topic of educating for character that can, if utilized and expanded, inform practice and assist in the development of effective programs.

The 1990s is not the first time in our history that character education has captured the attention of American educators. In the first three decades

The Early Character Education Movement

The character education movement of the first three decades of this century utilized elaborate codes of conduct and group activities in school clubs as the primary means to teach character (McClellan 1992, McKown 1935). A widely used code of conduct was the "Children's Morality Code," which emphasized "ten laws of right living": self-control, good health, kindness, sportsmanship, self-reliance, duty, reliability, truth, good workmanship, and teamwork (Hutchins 1917). Schools attempted to integrate such codes into all aspects of school life, and student clubs that harnessed the power of peer influence were created to encourage students to practice the virtues.

Between 1924 and 1929, the Institute of Social and Religious Research, funded by John D. Rockefeller and housed at Teachers College, Columbia University, undertook the Character Education Inquiry, the most detailed and comprehensive inquiry to date into the nature of character and the school's role in its development (Hartshorne and May 1928-1930). The study assessed the character-related behavior of 10,865

Didactic methods alone—codes, pledges, and the like—are unlikely to have any significant effect on character.



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youths, mostly in grades 5 through 8, in 23 communities across the United States, focusing on student deceit and service. In schools where character education was taking place, the researchers created classroom situations that provided students with opportunities to cheat and to voluntarily engage in helping behavior. They found that the incidence of deceit varied widely in classrooms and schools and that deceit was situationally specific: honesty in one situation did not predict well to another. Furthermore, they found no relationship between membership in organizations that purported to teach honesty and honest behavior. Among the many disturbing conclusions within the 1,782 pages of text is the following:

The mere urging of honest behavior by teachers or the discussion of standards and ideals of honesty, no matter how much such general ideals may be "emotionalized," has no necessary relation to conduct.... there seems to be evidence that such effects as may result are not generally good and are sometimes unwholesome.... the prevailing ways of inculcating ideals probably do little good and do some harm.

The Character Education Inquiry raised serious questions regarding the effectiveness of heavily didactic approaches to character education.

Moral and Values Education

By the 1950s, character education curriculums had all but disappeared in American schools. The year 1966 signaled the beginning of a new period of interest. In the *School Review*, Lawrence Kohlberg for the first time linked his cognitive-developmental theory of moral reasoning with the practice of moral education in schools (1966). Louis Raths, Merrill Harmin, and Sidney Simon coauthored *Values and Teaching*, the highly influential

first statement of the theory and technique of values clarification (1966). Although not the only approaches advocated, moral dilemma discussion and values clarification dominated the field of moral education for the next 20 years and were extensively researched.

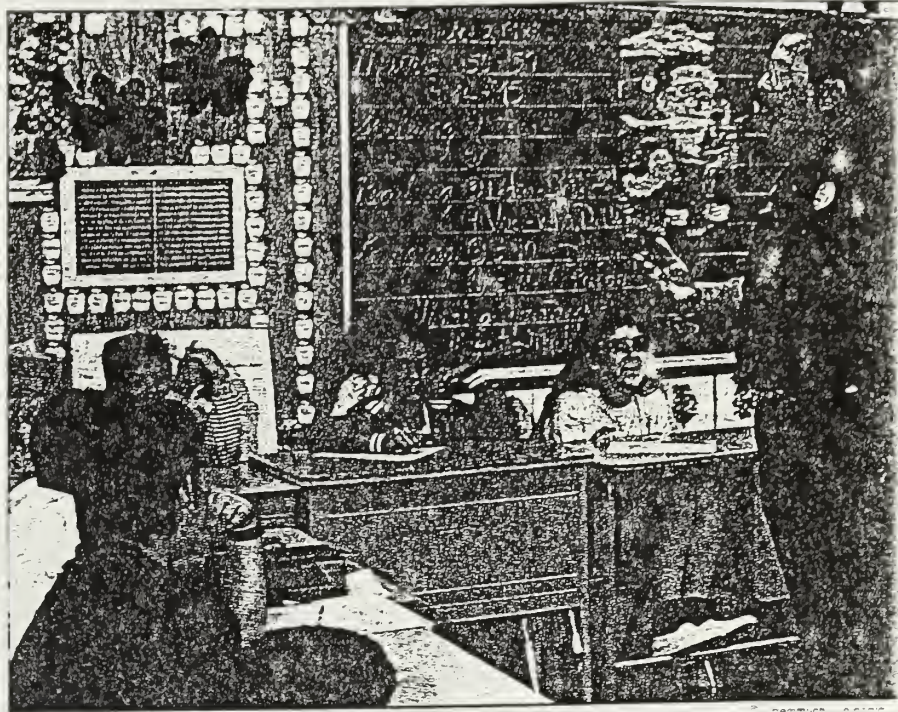
How much impact these two approaches had on educational practice is difficult to judge. The values clarification approach was by far the more popular with teachers; one handbook of strategies for values clarification sold 600,000 copies (Kirschenbaum 1992), an almost unheard-of figure for an education methods textbook.

Although the two approaches were different in many ways, they both emphasized that teachers were not to moralize. In Kohlberg's moral dilemma discussion approach, the teacher facilitated student reasoning, assisted students in resolving moral conflicts, and ensured that the discussion took place in an environment that contained the conditions essential for stage growth in moral reasoning. Values clarification sought to have each student clarify his or her values by following the prescribed seven-step valuing process. The teacher only facilitated the valuing process and, for fear of influencing students, withheld personal opinions. The teacher

was to respect whatever values the students arrived at.

All of the reviews of the moral discussion research program have reached similar conclusions (Enright et al. 1983; Lawrence 1980; Leming 1981, 1985; Schlaefli et al. 1985); namely, that in approximately 80 percent of the semester-length studies a mean upward shift in student reasoning of one-fourth to one-half of a stage will result when students are engaged in the process of discussing moral dilemmas where cognitive disequilibrium and exposure to examples of the next highest state of moral reasoning are present.

The achievement of the predicted results of the moral discussion approach must be interpreted cautiously. First, the stage growth found as a result of the moral discussion approach is in stages 2, 3, and 4 and is small—usually less than one-third of a stage for interventions of at least one semester. Second, none of the moral dilemma studies reviewed used any form of social or moral behavior as a dependent variable. Kohlberg and his associates did argue that moral reasoning and moral behavior were related at the highest stages, the stages of principled reasoning (Kohlberg and Candee 1984); however, analyses of the evidence have detected only weak



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Social influence programs reduce the incidence of drug usage.

associations (Blasi 1980). One study found that among 4th and 8th grade students, stage 1 and stage 3 of moral reasoning are associated with fewer conduct problems than stage 2 reasoning (Richards et al. 1992). This finding raises the interesting possibility that raising students' reasoning from stage 1 to stage 2 may be associated with a deterioration in student conduct. Thus, even though the moral dilemma approach "works," it appears to be of little practical utility in influencing students' behavior.

Research findings of the values clarification approach are also highly consistent: they show no significant changes in the dependent variables (Leming 1981, 1985, 1987). Whereas research on the moral dilemma approach involves only a single dependent variable (stage of moral reasoning), the values clarification research program contains a wide range of dependent variables such as values thinking, self-concept, attitudes toward the subject matter and the school, dogmatism, and value-related behavior. While the percentage of the studies finding the predicted results varies from dependent variable to dependent variable, the predicted change in a given variable is seldom found in more than 20 percent of the studies (Leming 1987). The research base for the moral and values education curriculums of this period offers little assistance in planning for character education where changes in student behavior is a central objective.

Research on Sex and Drug Education

Two research programs that have evolved over the past 30 years, although not typically described as moral or character education, have focused on character-related student behavior: sex and drug education. In his seminal review, Kirby (1980)

concluded that sex education programs generally increase student knowledge about sexuality, change some attitudes—students become more tolerant of the sexual practices of others—but do not change students' values or sexual behavior. Most researchers in this field are in unanimous agreement (Dawson 1986; Furstenberg et al. 1985; Hofferth and Miller 1989; Kirby 1980, 1984; Marsiglio and Mott 1986; Reppucci and Herman 1991; Stout and Rivara 1989).

The most recent development in the field of sex education is value-based programs. These programs place sexuality within the context of human relationships and emphasize values such as respect for others, personal dignity, commitment, self-control, and abstinence. Two recent programs, one short-term and one long-term, illustrate the nature and level of effectiveness of these programs.

The Responsible Sexual Values Program in Franklin County, Ohio, presents a three-day instructional unit at the middle school level that integrates information about human sexuality, marriage, and parenting skills with group activities (Adameck and Thoms 1991). After the curriculum has been presented, volunteer student organizations provide peer support for the norm of abstinence. In addition, parents attend a two-session workshop on the goals of the program and participate in students' homework assignments. The first-year evaluation of the program indicated that student knowledge of sexuality increased, as did attitudes supportive of the abstinent lifestyle; however, by the fifth year any effects on attitudes and behavior had disappeared (Adamek 1993). Problems with faithful implementation of the program, as well as the increasing power of peer group norms,

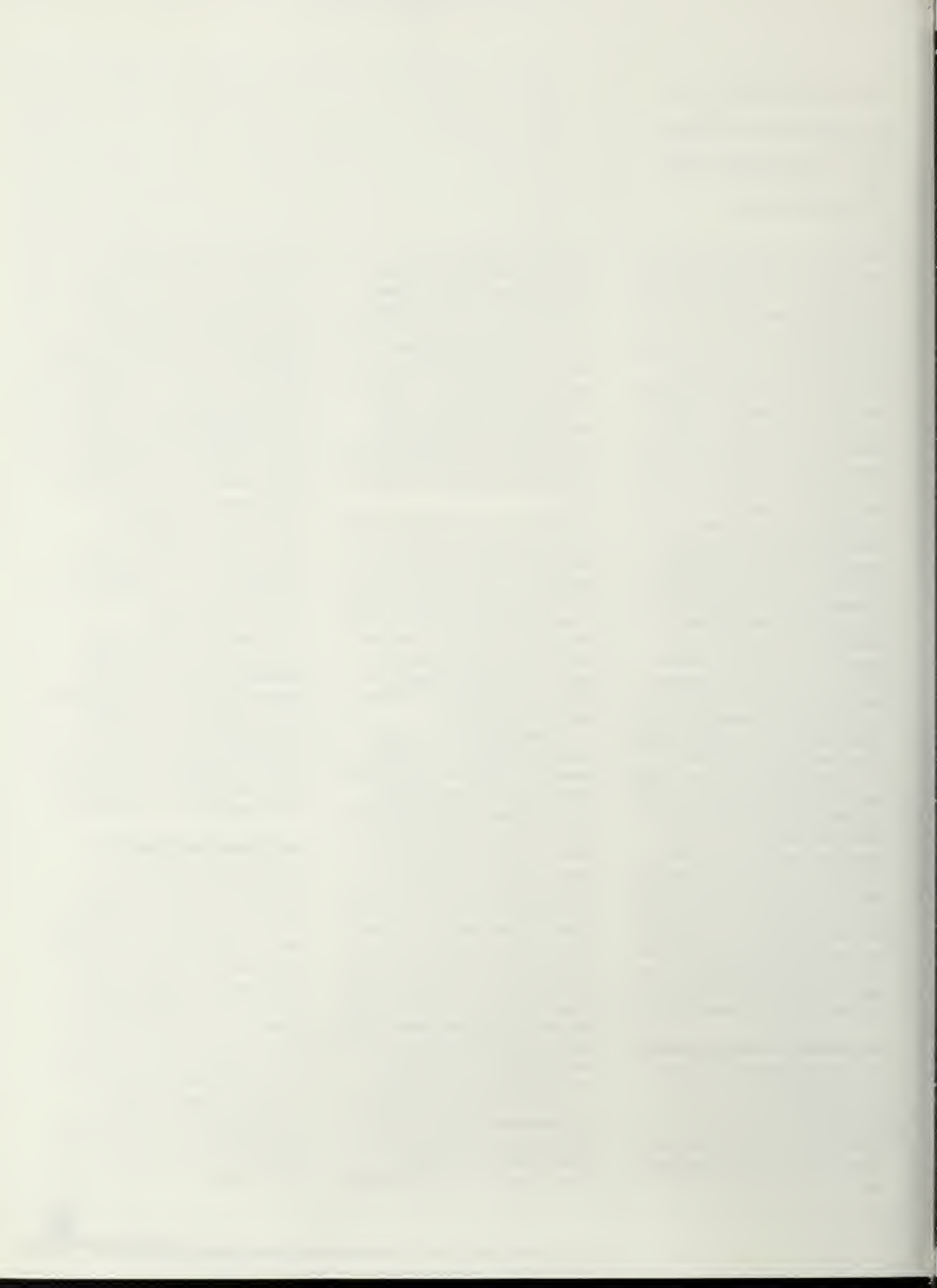
apparently combined to overwhelm any possible program effects.

A similar, but broader and more intensive value-based program is the School/Community Program for Sexual Risk Reduction Among Teens, developed at the University of South Carolina (Vincent et al. 1987). The K-12 program integrates value-based sex education information and activities within regular school subjects. Implemented on a countywide basis, the program involved not only parents but also clergy, church leaders, local newspapers, and radio stations. Special events raised community awareness. Two years following the implementation of the program, estimated pregnancy rates for females aged 14-17 had declined.

Value-based sex education that involves schools, parents, and the community in a common effort to encourage responsible sexual behavior appears to have some potential for changing adolescent attitudes and sexual behavior; however, due to the relatively few number of evaluations, caution should be used in attempting to draw generalizations from the data.

Three Waves of Drug Education

Both the public and teens see substance abuse as one of the most important problems facing America today. In the past 30 years there have been three broad shifts in the approach to drug education. Throughout the 1960s, drug abuse education largely provided information regarding the deleterious effects of drugs and used scare tactics to deter students from substance abuse. The "affective" or "humanistic" strategies of the early-to mid-1970s focused on teaching students personal skills such as problem solving and decision making and sought to develop positive health-related attitudes.



Character develops within a social web or environment.

Reviewers of the research on these first two waves of drug abuse curriculums uniformly concluded that these programs tend to be successful in increasing knowledge, but less successful in changing attitudes; they have little or no effect on drug and alcohol abuse (Berberian et al. 1976, Kinder et al. 1980, Schapps et al. 1981).

Drug education in the 1980s shifted to the "social influences" strategy. This peer-centered approach tried to make students aware of the social factors that create pressures to use drugs and to help students develop the skills to resist those pressures through role-playing in class. Group activity and the discussion of personal experiences seek to develop group norms against drug abuse.

Three recent program evaluations conducted with upper elementary or junior high school students suggest that this approach has promise. Flay and associates found that a six-lesson smoking unit resulted in reduced smoking behavior (1985). Dielman and associates found that a four-lesson social influence program reduced the rate of increase of alcohol use among 6th graders who had already begun to use alcohol (1989). Ellickson and Bell found that their eight-lesson program reduced alcohol and tobacco use among junior high school students but did not sustain the reduction over time with regard to alcohol use (1990).

Reported data from the first two years of the Midwestern Prevention Project also support the social influences strategy (Pentz et al. 1989). A longitudinal trial of a primary prevention program of cigarette, alcohol, and marijuana use, this comprehensive, community-based program uses school study, parent involvement with homework, the mass media, community organization, and health policy

programming to combat adolescent drug use. The entire adolescent population from 15 midwestern communities constitutes the sample. In the first two years, 22,500 6th and 7th grade students were exposed to the program. By the second year of what is to be a six-year evaluation, the use of all three target drugs was lower among students in the program for one year than among students just entering the program.

From the review of drug education programs, we can conclude that (1) gains in knowledge were common to all such programs; (2) lecture appears to have the smallest effect on attitudes, while peer programs have a greater influence and; (3) social influence programs appear to be the most effective in reducing the incidence of drug usage. Although effects declined in all the programs over time, such attrition was generally less substantial in the social influence programs.

The Impact of School Atmosphere

Introducing another angle on character education, a number of school-based research projects have investigated the relationship between school atmosphere and student behavior.

One of the major educational success stories over the past decade is the use of cooperative learning strategies. In cooperative learning, students are placed in small groups where the group learning assumes central importance and students are responsible not only for their own learning but also for the learning of others.

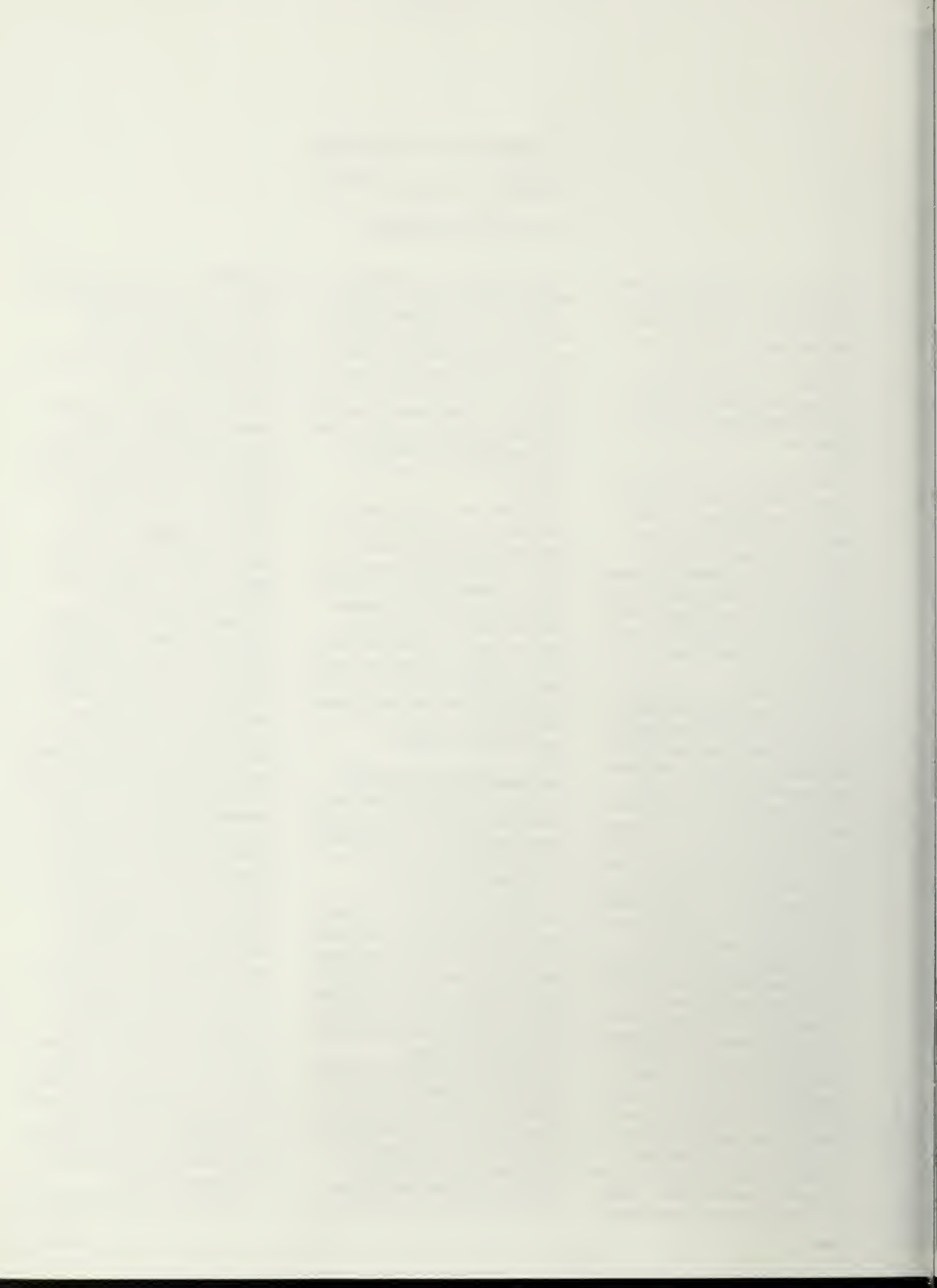
This type of learning environment organization has resulted in impressive student achievement and positive social values and behavior. Reviews of the extensive literature on this topic have found that in addition to increasing academic achievement, students learned to get along better

with students of other races and ethnic groups, were more accepting of mainstreamed students, demonstrated greater mutual concern for one another, and were more likely to engage in prosocial behavior (Johnson et al. 1981, Slavin 1990).

Another approach that emphasizes student responsibility is the just community approach developed by Lawrence Kohlberg and his associates. In the late 1970s, Kohlberg revised his perspective on moral education, emphasizing collectively derived social norms rather than individual values as a goal of moral education (Kohlberg 1978, Power et al. 1989). This new emphasis grew out of Kohlberg's experiences chronicling the democratic development of norms required to organize the social environment in small alternative schools.

In the just community approach, students confront real problems related to the social organization of the school. Within a democratic context, students discuss group problems and develop the norms by which group life is organized. For example, in a four-year study of the Cluster School in Brookline, Massachusetts, Power and Reimer identified four problematic areas in the life of the school: race relations, stealing, drug usage, and absenteeism (1978). Through a process of collective deliberation, students and teachers proposed and agreed on norms for behavior. The group then enforced compliance. Because this approach harnessed strong peer pressure within a democratic context, students eventually modified antisocial behavior in three of the four normative areas. In the case of drug usage, no collective norm emerged because the students did not share the teachers' perception that such a norm was needed.

While the just community research



is based on an atypical educational setting, there are encouraging data from research on school climate in more typical school settings. Several studies have shown that schools that seem to have an impact on student character respect students, encourage student participation in the life of the school, expect students to behave responsibly, and give them the opportunity to do so. Discipline is not always imposed, but within the framework of shared group norms, students accept discipline as legitimate and change their behavior accordingly (Minuchin et al. 1969, Boesel 1978, Coleman et al. 1981, Rutter et al. 1979).

Recently, community service programs have gained popularity as a potential means for shaping youth character (Nathan and Kielsmeier 1991). Such programs place students

in activities designed to exert a positive influence on the community. Studies of earlier but similar programs have detected only small effects on students' sense of civic responsibility as a result of these programs (Conrad and Hedin 1982, Holland and Andre 1987, Rutter and Newmann 1989). This pattern of results may be due in part to the inability to control the nature of the students' experiences in the field setting, resulting in uneven and less than desirable experiences for many students. In addition, the programs were electives, and student commitment varied.

Contemporary Character Education Programs

With striking similarity to the 1920s, the late 1980s and early 1990s have been a time of feverish activity with regard to character education (Lickona

1991, National School Boards Association 1987). Also like the 1920s, few of these new character education programs have systematically evaluated their effects on children.

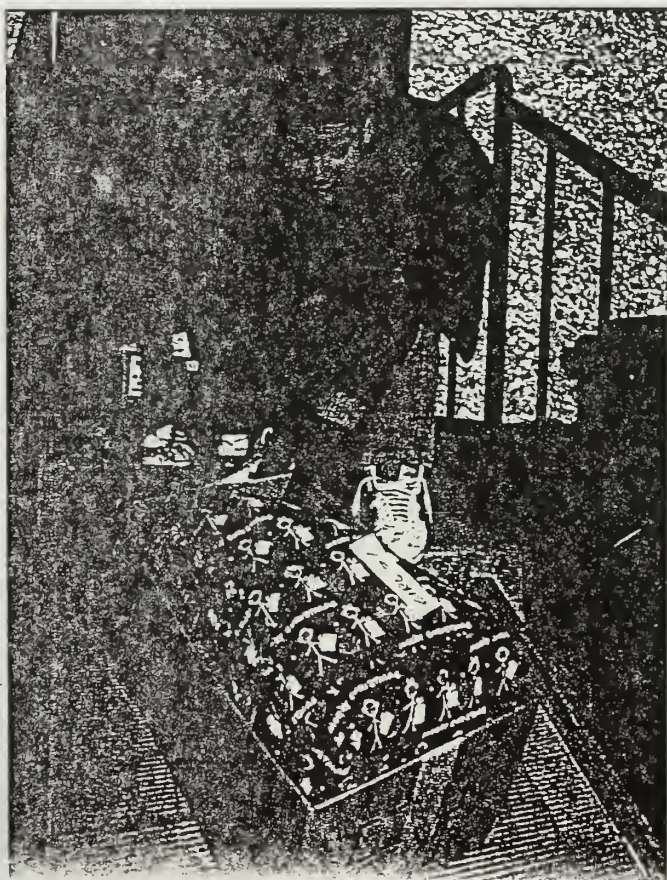
Two approaches exist to the evaluation of contemporary character education programs. The first relies on informal evaluations that collect anecdotal evidence or survey teachers and administrators; it does not attempt to control for potential bias in information on student behaviors, nor does it compare students within the programs with nonprogram students.

One program that uses informal evaluation is the American Institute of Character Education in San Antonio, Texas, which produces character education curriculum materials for grades K-6. The curriculum consists of posters and a set of stories that illustrate values such as honesty, kindness, and generosity. Teachers discuss the stories with the students and make the students aware of the relevance of the values in their lives.

By the late 1980s, the Institute claimed to have reached as many as 18,000 classrooms in 44 states with its curriculum. Supporters assert that the program has reduced alcohol and drug abuse, encouraged school attendance, and discouraged vandalism, but these claims are supported entirely by testimonials (Goble and Brooks 1983).

A second character education program that has only informal data on its effectiveness is that of the Jefferson Center for Character Education. The Jefferson Center program attempts to teach the language of values such as honesty, perseverance, respect, and tolerance. Teachers help students learn the words, understand the concepts, and finally recognize and practice the appropriate behavior. The schoolwide program utilizes examples from the students' experiences and the school environment to reinforce the value behaviors.

Beginning in fall of 1990, 31 elementary and middle schools in Los Angeles, California, implemented the program. In the fall of 1990 and in the spring of 1991, 20 elementary and 5 middle school administrators were asked by phone to assess the program's effectiveness. The administrators stated that all forms of reported



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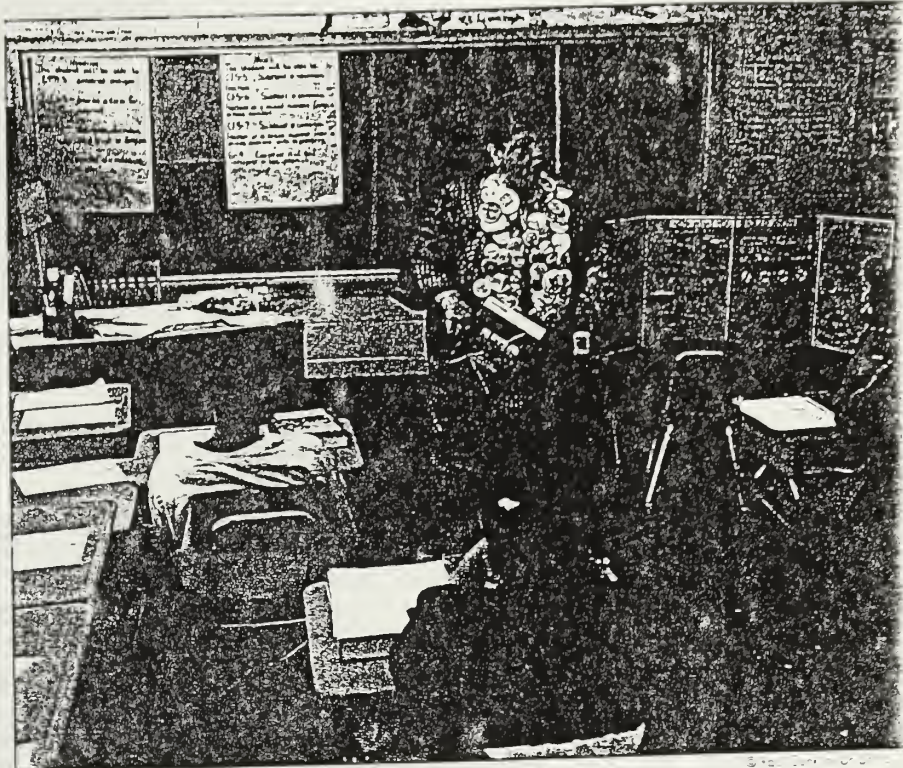
discipline problems had decreased, student morale had increased, parents had become more involved in the life of the school, and students were acting more responsibly (Satnick 1991).

The second evaluation approach utilizes experimental designs, focuses on student behavior, compares program students with nonprogram students, and attempts to control for potential sources of bias. Two recent character education programs that have assessed their effectiveness through controlled research efforts are the Weber County Character Education Project and the Child Development Program.

The Weber County K-6 program in Utah is based on a five-step teaching model that (1) stimulates interest in a principle, (2) models the principle, (3) integrates the principle with prior knowledge, (4) involves parents with homework, and (5) extends principles learned into real-life situations. The program currently involves 3,000 students and 109 teachers.

A grant from the Thrasher Foundation has enabled the Institute for Research and Evaluation of Salt Lake City, Utah, to undertake a longitudinal study of the effect of the Weber County program on the character of youth (Weed 1993). Over a two-year period, teachers in the program classrooms reported a statistically significant two-and-one-half-times reduction in problem behavior in students. In contrast, problem behavior in control schools actually increased. Additionally, it was found that students who had been in the program for two years and had moved into 7th grade scored significantly better on attitudes against substance abuse and in favor of positive school conduct than did nonprogram students.

A second controlled evaluation of a character education program is that of



the Child Development Project in San Ramon, California (Solomon et al. 1987). Supported by an initial grant from the Hewlett Foundation, this project implemented a K-6 character education program in three elementary schools. The curriculum consists of five components: (1) teacher highlighting and exposing students to prosocial examples; (2) cooperative learning activities; (3) use of children's literature and classroom incidents to develop respect, sensitivity, and understanding toward others; (4) involving children in helping relationships; and (5) fostering moral reasoning and self-control through student-centered development, discipline.

The program has been formally evaluated using a longitudinal design that tracked students over a seven-year period from kindergarten through 6th grade (Benninga et al. 1991). The evaluation collected data using hypothetical-reflective interview measures of social problem-solving skills and observational data on four types of classroom behavior: (1) supportive and friendly behavior, (2) negative behavior, (3) spontaneous prosocial behavior, and (4) harmoniousness.

The study found that after five years in the program, students scored significantly higher on measures of sensi-

tivity and consideration of others' needs. In addition, they preferred conflict resolution strategies that were more prosocial (Battistich et al. 1989). The program's impact on character-related student behavior showed mixed results. No difference was detected between comparison students and program students with regard to the incidence of negative behaviors. On the other three behavioral variables, the evaluation did detect a significant difference favoring the schools using the program when data from all five years were combined. These differences, however, were not consistent across all grade levels. Solomon et al. (1988), and when cooperative group activities and teacher competence were used as covariates, no program effect was detected on the variable of harmoniousness.

The evaluation also followed a group of program students into junior high school, obtaining positive results on a wide range of variables such as democratic values, social understanding, feelings of loneliness, social anxiety, and higher-order reading comprehension. Out of a total of 107 program versus comparison tests, however, only in 11 cases did these tests favor the program students (Developmental Studies Center 1990).



Sex and drug education programs that elicit help from peers, parents, and the community have been found to be the most effective in changing student behavior.

The original six-year evaluation found that the detected prosocial behaviors did not generalize outside of the program classrooms and classmates (Solomon et al. 1987). The junior high extension data found that teachers did not rate the prosocial behavior of program students any different from comparison students (Developmental Studies Center 1993). In this regard, the results from the Child Development Program are consistent with the findings of Hartshorne and May (1928-1930); namely, character-related behavior and moral behavior tends, to a large extent, to be situationally specific.

What We've Learned So Far

With the caveat that the present research base is small, disparate, and inconsistent, we can offer the following observations.

- Didactic methods alone—codes, pledges, teacher exhortation, and the like—are unlikely to have any significant or lasting effect on character.

- The development of students' capacity to reason about questions of moral conduct does not result in a related change in conduct. Apparently, one cannot reason one's way to virtuous conduct.

- Character develops within a social web or environment. The nature of that environment, the messages it sends to individuals, and the behaviors it encourages and discourages are important factors to consider in character education. Clear rules of conduct, student ownership of those rules, a supportive environment, and satisfaction resulting from complying with the norms of the

environment shape behavior.

- Character educators should not expect char-

acter formation to be easy. Schools that expect easily achieved and dramatic effects will be disappointed.

Several limitations of the current research are worth noting.

- The majority of programs have been limited to elementary schools. Given that the rise of the current character education movement has been prompted largely by adolescent risk-taking behaviors, this focus is somewhat puzzling. Because research with adolescent samples has shown that it is difficult to sustain program effects over time, it is important that research on character education for this group receive intensive attention.

- Few carefully controlled evaluations of character education programs exist. Research cannot inform practice with only informal evaluations of low generalizability.

- All studies that have utilized multiple classrooms have detected considerable variations in program effects between classrooms. One possible explanation is differences in program implementation. Another possible explanation is the nature of the teacher and the climate established in that classroom: some exemplary teachers may naturally establish classrooms climates that promote good behavior. As in the Character Education Inquiry, we need to recognize that classroom differences are the rule, rather than the exception (Hartshorne and May 1928).

Finally, those interested in character education have long believed that morally inspiring literature should be a part of any character education program. Surprisingly, not one research study has attempted to assess

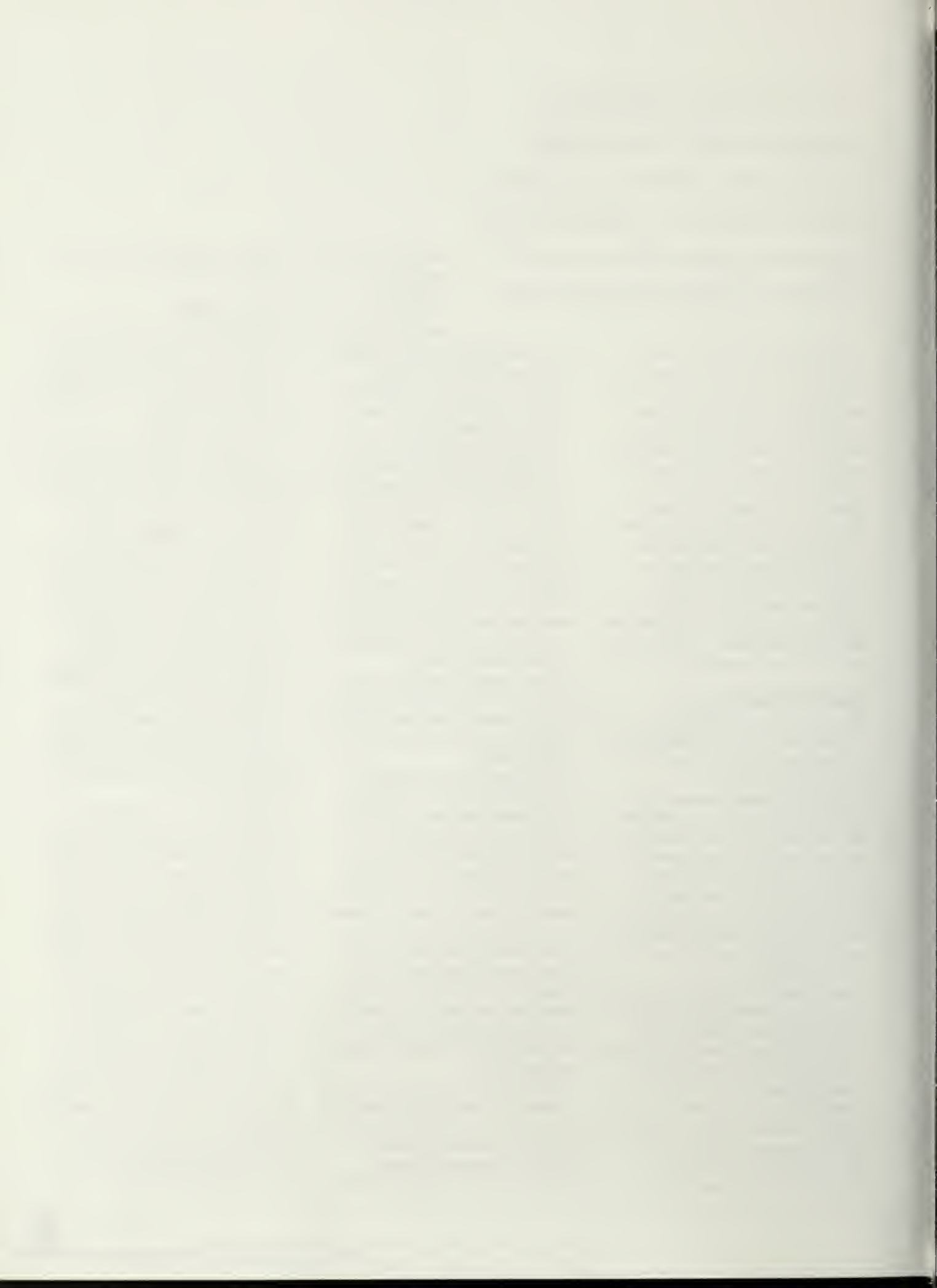
whether reading such literature has the expected effect on character.

Future Directions

If character education in the 1990s is to avoid the "confusion and lack of clear knowledge" that beset character education efforts in the 1920s (Yulish 1980), a research base to inform practice must be developed.

A useful theoretical perspective that has some potential for unifying the field of character education is found in the works of individuals as diverse as Aristotle, Emile Durkheim, John Rawls, and Lawrence Kohlberg. These authors believe that three levels of development related to the formation of character exist. At the lowest level, rules are external to the child and behavioral conformity is assured through discipline and self-interest. At the next level, rules are embodied in social groups, and compliance with the rules is the result of youths' desire to gain acceptance within that group. At the highest level, rules are interpreted in terms of self-chosen principles.

Existing research supports this framework. That character is fostered by clear rules—fairly enforced—and by orderly classroom and school environments suggests that discipline is an essential element of moral education. The influence of cooperative learning methods and just community environments on student character suggests mechanisms by which schools can utilize the dynamics of attachment to groups in a positive pro-character manner. In addition, the newest wave of sex and drug education programs that elicit help from peers, parents, and community in defining and supporting appropriate behavior have been found to be the most effective to date in changing student behavior. Finally, the moral dilemma discussion method-



At present, the lack of a coherent approach to research hampers the effort to develop effective character education programs.

ology provides a means by which schools can assist youths in the development of their moral reasoning so that, as adulthood approaches, they develop the capacity for principled moral reasoning.

The development of a "grand theory" of character education and research based on that theory is a crucial next step in the future of character education. At present, atheoretical thinking and research on character education hampers the effort to develop effective programs. The current research in the field consists of disparate bits and pieces of sociology, philosophy, child development research, sociopolitical analyses, and a variety of different program evaluations. While such diversity is inevitable, character education needs to develop a more coherent view that can integrate the available research, provide focus to the movement, and guide the curriculum planning and research in a way that yields cumulative knowledge regarding the schools' role in fostering character. ■

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